Catherine Bruce

Sydney

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/bwb_KU-314-726

TRIUMPH

By the same Author

TRUST EMILY, 3/6 net

TRIUMPH

BY MAY EDGINTON

CHAPMAN & DODD, LIMITED
LONDON AND SYDNEY MCMXXIII

PRINTED FOR
CHAPMAN AND
DODD, LIMITED
BY CAHILL
AND CO., LTD.
AT PARKGATE
PRINTING WORKS
DUBLIN. 1923

TRIUMPH

I.

For the first time Anna had yielded to Silver's oft-hinted requests and had said, "All right, then. Come about 7.30—no, eight. I'll have arranged supper then. And I'll sing you the Barcarolle. . . . You've never heard my piano—a beauty."

Several times now she had met Silver, after the great Garnet Printing Works closed, for dinner at some little restaurant suited to his restricted purse ; and, oftener still, he had offered his escort part of her way, and they had lingered in the winter quietnesses of the Embankment and looked down at the shining dark river, and talked and talked. But this was the first time that she had said he might follow her home.

Spring was already in the air that late February day—a little mist that was not fog over the sky; a little breath that was not wind passing softly through the streets; a tender warmth lying on the city. And Anna left the great works down by the grime of Waterloo, uplifted in her hopeful youth by these soft promises, and soon found herself on the Embankment, going in the direction of Victoria. And the old river had a spring-night song for her, and the drifting gulls and the strutting pigeons were carriers of other lovely messages. Still it was hardly Silver who gave her such a happy heart. The red February sunset had more to do with it.

When Anna reached her rooms in Read Street she saw Lucia's car outside, and upstairs was Lucia. Lucia—Mrs. Aveline—had come in her car—the most luxuriously fitted little coupé on the market ; in which coupé her perfect

chauffeur waited—in her great sable cape, her velvet picture hat, her slender shoes with huge buckles of cut steel, silk frock, silk lingerie, perfumed, waved, manicured and pedicured, to see her sister from the Garnet Printing Works. She had come from her tiny house in Mayfair to these two mean rooms where Anna lived, which Anna proudly called home ; and the rich woman's glance said, as usual, " Oh, my dear ! This low hovel of yours ! I can hardly bear it ! "

" Lucia ! " said Anna.

The sisters embraced. They loved each other. In spite of Lucia's silk and furs, Anna's cambric and woollen, they loved each other. After they had kissed they stood off for a mutual survey.

" You don't change," said Lucia in her high, restless voice ; " you don't get sadder. How do you manage that ? You don't get wiser. Can't you somehow manage that ? You look the same as ever."

" It's only three months, Lucia, since you went."

" Three months, my dear, seems a lifetime."

" It seems three minutes."

Lucia stood looking slowly round the room.

" You see my new curtains ? " said Anna.

" Are they new ? " Lucia replied in wonder. Then : " Oh, my dear, it all looks unspeakable. So poor ; so sparse ; so terribly Spartan. Have you thought over what I said when we last met here—that it's so absurd for an attractive woman to be Spartan ? "

Anna shook her head.

" You have all you want, Lucia ? "

" Oh, who has ? " said Lucia with her restless, high laugh. " But I have all that a woman can have ; the alimony's big. Oh, I'm so glad it's all over—the fusses and frets and quarrels of eighteen years ! And my life my own to do as I like with ! "

" Sit down," said Anna.

Lucia seated herself in the uneasy oak armchair. She had left to her, in its entire beauty, her extraordinary grace

of movement. Her overthin limbs fell naturally into a lovely pose. Anna remembered Lucia's grace so well, though she had seen it only once before to-day in the last eighteen years. And when Lucia, crossing her bony knees and lying back in the oak chair, took out of her gorgeous vanity bag her mirror and puff and lip stick and tiny pot of rouge, and began to overlay with them the fatigue of her face, Anna was reminded of the bride Lucia, who, all those years ago, had stood in an even poorer room than this, the room that the mother and her two daughters shared, and gazed with excited eyes at her dazzling young reflection—Lucia at twenty-four ; Lucia with her coveted prize of riches within her grasp.

" You remind me——" said Anna almost unconsciously, and paused.

Lucia paused, too, in the exigent business of making up. She looked at Anna long and rather huntedly. Anna saw ghosts in her eyes.

" Go on, my dear."

" Nothing," said Anna.

" Nothing much, anyway," said Lucia ; " but why not say it all the same ? Because you reminded me, too, standing there like that, watching me like that, exactly as you watched me from your bed, sitting on that old checked counterpane, staring at me dressing for my wedding with Fred."

" And admiring you passionately."

" You were only four."

" But how I remember you then, Lucia ! I used to adore you. I couldn't imagine the angels more beautiful than you."

" Angels ! " said Lucia, laughing. She peered hard at her face in the little mirror she held up. Her hand was trembling. She swept the powder puff very slowly over her face. " Much water under the bridge since then," she said. " But how some things come back to one, don't they ? You knew I was going right away ; I remember you realised

it at the last minute—mother smacked your hands for grabbing my silk frock."

She went on powdering some seconds after her face was artistically finished, still hearing, in this sudden moment of memories, Anna's little voice, raucous with grief, crying good-bye to her out of the long ago.

"That was Fred," she said, smiling again after a little while. "Neither you nor mother ever saw Gerald or Bob. How—how life varies! I was thinking this morning how extraordinarily some women live. Fred took me out of my misery with you and mother ——"

"Were you very miserable, Lucia?"

"My dear! I should say so! I always knew life held more than that for a girl with any attractions. Do you remember how mother used to preach and warn? Stuff! You see, Anna dear, one makes out all right if one has sense—and the necessary looks, of course. I haven't aged so much, Anna? Don't look my age, do you think?"

Anna was looking thoughtfully at Lucia. She hesitated.

"You were always lovely, Lucia. But, oh, Lucia, why—why—you're forty-two!"

"Don't!" said Lucia.

"What does it matter?" said Anna.

"What does it matter!" Lucia echoed ironically

She got up, moved about the room, looking at the few sticks of furniture, all dwarfed by the piano, which nearly filled up the space of one wall.

"Yes," she said abruptly, "Fred took me out of this kind of thing. Eighteen years ago! I really loved Fred, Anna; I did, truly. I adored him. When he left me ——"

Anna tried to be silent, but her curiosity about this loved stranger sister so recently restored to her ken broke bounds. "Lucia, why? How could he!"

"Gerald," said Lucia, hesitating. She looked down and up, bit her lips and smiled. She looked proud, and somehow her pride was a little pitiable. "I was always so terribly admired."

"That was in Honolulu, Lucia?"

"Yes. . . . Oh, Anna, life was such a romance! . . . Why do I say 'was'? I mean, is a romance. I don't know why I talk as if I was old. . . . . Does all this interest you, dear—you in your funny inexperience?"

"Oh, Lucia! Tremendously!"

"Married life gets humdrum, darling."

"And—and Gerald?"

"Died, my dear." She sighed, and easy tears welled into her big and rather hollowed eyes.

"Then you married Mr. Aveline?"

"Five years ago. Yes, just five years ago."

"And divorced him, Lucia?"

Lucia nodded and sighed.

"How could he!" cried Anna, again in a rush of sympathy.

Lucia did not reply. She looked a little bitter.

"Lucia—never any babies?"

"My dear, no! No! Men don't really care whether you have them or not."

"Don't they, Lucia?"

"Oh, my dear, all a man cares about is a woman's looks. They're all we have to trade with, Anna. I was careful never to lose my looks. You can see that. People often take me for a girl in the twenties. If one has children—well, one never knows."

"And so," said Anna, "you are well satisfied, dear?"

"What else could I get out of life than what I've got?" answered Lucia.

"I don't know," said Anna, laying aside her hat. "I'm not sure," she added. "It is so bewildering, Lucia, so bewildering."

Lucia looked, fascinated, at her sister's beautiful, thick, smooth, tightly dressed hair. It lay like satin over the crown of her head, curled over her ears and took subtle shape in a heavy coil just above the nape of her neck. She was tall and slim, firm and strong, with a grace of move-

ment almost equalling Lucia's, but less languorous and exotic.

"Anna, anything could be done with you if you were dressed. Oh, if I could only dress you! If you would only submit, my dear, to me!"

"I don't submit to anyone, Lucia."

"But I could do such wonderful things!"

"What do you want to do with me?"

"Anna, your looks are all you have to trade with, just as mine were. Believe me, my dear, looks are the only asset that really counts with men—with wealthy men who can afford their fancy. Why do you stay in that dreadful printing works—you said a printing works? You must marry like I did!" Anna did not reply.

"Darling," said Lucia, thrusting forward her sables so that Anna could get the feel of them against her cheek, "don't you like these things?"

"I love them," said Anna. "One day I may get them for myself."

"Oh, fool! How? That idea of yours about your voice? But listen! If you married well you could train ——"

Anna smiled. Lucia paused.

"Anna darling, I can't have you to live with me ——"

"I wouldn't come if you could."

"—— because Bob Aveline made that condition. Oh, Bob is a hard man! He knew I had poor relations. He makes the alimony three thousand pounds a year on condition that I don't spend more than fifty pounds a year on any poor relations. I give accounts to his lawyers regularly. I have to if I want the money. He always said he would never support hangers-on in any form."

"He needn't have feared me."

"But I could do things. I could give you some of my frocks, give parties for you. In six months I'd guarantee to have you married as well as I married—as well as I married three times!"

Again Anna smiled, and again the smile checked Lucia.

"What do you mean?"

"Has it been so wonderful, Lucia?"

"I—I've had all I could wish for."

"It doesn't sound—lovely, Lucia."

"Lovely? My dear! As if everything—as—as if life could be lovely! Besides, what do you mean—lovely?"

"I am not sure."

"Is your life at this damnable printing works and in these atrocious rooms lovely, darling?"

"It is beautiful," said Anna.

"The life of a working woman of the commoner sort—not professional, not successful ——"

"Lucia, I keep myself and I kept mother before she died, and I paid for her last illness myself. I did it myself. I am successful."

"Oh, Anna, but you don't know! You see, you've never tasted ——"

"And, Lucia, it is my own life; my own rooms; I belong to myself; I can make myself as I choose. It's fine!"

"Fine!"

"I contrast it with mother's life—and yours."

"You can't compare mother and me. Poor mother was a fool. I'm not. I—I well understand that. Mother's life was a lesson to you. Oh, I well understand that!"

"Lucia, mother married a very poor man, who didn't treat her well, and she lived unquestioningly the life of a drudge and a slave. You made up your mind you would never submit to anything like that, and you didn't. But—but what have you done?"

"Well, you know I've had everything ——"

She fingered a rope of pearls that hung from her over-slender neck. The hunted look was in her eyes again, but she scared it away with her light, high laugh.

"You haven't had enough for me," said Anna.

"Well," said Lucia, and she almost whispered, "what do you want?"

"The best," said Anna.

Lucia stroked her sables without speaking.

"I don't know where is the best or what is the best," cried Anna. "It isn't only pearls; it isn't only sables; it isn't only three husbands; it isn't what mother had; it isn't what you had. It isn't necessarily here or necessarily on the other side of the world. It's somewhere at the top of the world, Lucia. I do know that."

"The top of the world," Lucia repeated.

"Somehow," said Anna in a passionate voice—"somehow, Lucia, I want life to be fine. I will wait and wait, and look and look, and work and work, and presently I will see just how ——"

"You think ——" began Lucia tremulously.

"I want life to be fine, Lucia. I—I want men to be big, not just rich husbands. I—I think, I know somehow in my heart, that if a man or a woman does not miss the way that's what each can find; what each can be, Lucia."

Lucia plucked at her pearls.

"Silly!" she said in an uncertain voice. "Silly to feel—to think like that. But we must talk again, my dear; t-t-talk again."

"When you like, Lucia," said Anna.

"I'll have to go now, Anna; I have people coming to dinner."

"I too!" laughed Anna, suddenly gay.

"Here?" exclaimed Lucia.

"Here," nodded Anna.

"Who comes here?" demanded Lucia, curious.

"A man is coming," said Anna; "a man whom you would disapprove of, dear; not rich, not powerful—a nobody."

"Anna, do listen to me! I'm—well, forty-two. We both know it. You're twenty-two. Your sole assets are your looks, your reputation and your wits. Use your wits,

my dear, to guard your looks and your reputation. I did. You can't be too exclusive, too circumspect ——"

"I am both," said Anna.

"People won't believe it—a girl like you letting a man—a nobody—come to her rooms."

"People can believe what they like."

"If you only knew what you are throwing away!"

"If you only knew what you've thrown away!"

Lucia started. Colour mounted higher in her face. Her eyes and cheek bones both seemed to glitter. She bit her lip. Her breath caught.

"Anna," she managed hardily, "you're one of these fatuous idealists. We'll talk again. I'll go before my dinner spoils and your guest arrives."

But as she turned towards the door Silver's knock fell upon it. Anna had screwed a funny little brass goblin knocker to her door and its rat-tat was very clear and loud.

"Don't introduce us," said Lucia sharply, drawing her great cape, as supple as gossamer, closely round her. "I sha'n't countenance it."

Anna opened the door, and Bertie Silver stood aside for Lucia to step disdainfully past him; then he came in. The door was shut upon him and Anna. "What a fine lady!" said Silver.

"My sister," replied Anna.

She motioned him to lay aside his hat and coat on a chair in a corner. She herself went to the hearth, and kneeling down put a match to the fire.

"I didn't know you had a sister," he was saying behind her.

"There are twenty years between us," said Anna. "She married a rich husband when I was only four. He took her away. I did not see her again till three months ago; and then, again, to-night."

"And the rich husband?"

"There have been three."

Anna coaxed the fire and a flame ran a long tongue chimneywards.

"Never mind your sister just now," said Silver softly, with an eager cry in his voice. Softly he came up behind her and dropped to his knees at her side. Their shoulders touched. "This is wonderful, Anna! Wonderful to be here! It seemed as if I would never see you alone. There have always been passers-by."

"Make the fire burn," said Anna slowly, "while I change my frock." She smiled, and Silver covertly watched the dimples that sparkled on either side of her lips. "I meant to have been ready, to have laid supper; but Lucia was here."

"And now Lucia isn't here," said Silver more eagerly yet.

His shoulder touched hers. Anna was on her feet with one soundless movement. She stood aloof, leaving him on his knees. He stared up at her. Then he sprang up too.

"How wary you are! How cautious of everybody! But, Anna, I ——"

"Make the fire burn," said Anna, and disappeared into the adjoining room.

As she shut the door between them she was conscious of the quick beating of her heart. She felt rather like a little wild animal, withdrawn into the dark, watching an enemy go by. But it did not occur to her—as it would have occurred to most of her girl associates—to turn the key in the lock of her door. She, who was so cautious, would have despised such a caution. She went to her dressing table, turned up the gas jet that hung over it and looked at herself. She had a wild flush and a wild brightness. She was a little startled at the unguessed exaltations that the admiring rapacity in Silver's eyes could conjure up. Yet she did not love Silver. She was sure of that.

She took off her knitted working dress, her cotton stockings and changed into a short-sleeved, short-skirted frock

of black silk. She put on silk stockings. In spite of her firmness of purpose and her clarity of brain and her untouched heart, she was woman enough to feel she owed that much—the soft frock and the sleek stockings—to Silver the man. Her caution had not entirely overlaid her natural instinct of pleasing. She smoothed her hair still smoother, and washed her hands and put a few drops of perfume on them ; then quietly opened her door and stood on the threshold, regarding Silver.

He was on the hearth where she had left him. He had made the fire burn. The flames were like fairies transforming the sparse room. He stood with his elbows on the mantelpiece, his head between his clenched hands, which was a characteristic attitude of his. His shoulders hunched up as she had seen them hunched scores of times, when he was talking, when he was excited, when he hunched them against the cold as, with her, he had walked the Embankment, overcoatless, because he wanted to give a wonderful girl wonderful dinners.

They had been wonderful dinners in little Italian restaurants ; cheap, smelly, savoury, lengthy dinners for the money, when a flask of Chianti set them both dreaming. Her heart was kind and grateful towards Silver as she regarded him.

" Sit down," she said.

He started round, came and took her hands, and in spite of her resistance kissed them.

" I'm going to help you lay this supper. I say, this is homelike. This is awfully sweet, Anna. If a man had a place like this to come home to every night —— "

" If I can have a place like this—a little, dingy, scrubby place—a man can have it too."

" Ah, but there'd have to be you in it ! "

" The cloth and the knives and forks are in the table drawer."

He laughed quietly and let her slip away from him, while he found the things and laid the cloth and arranged the

two covers upon it. But all the while he watched Anna about the room. She was turning out a canned stew into a saucepan, finding cheese and biscuits, and coffee and condensed milk. When he had finished he sat down in the uneasy oak armchair beside the fire and watched her. He crossed his knees and leaned back and gloated over the girl in the short-sleeved black frock moving about her housewifely ministrations for his comfort.

"Yes, Anna. How wonderful it would be!" She brought the saucepan to the fire and set it on to heat, kneeling on the hearthrug. Silver looked at her, wanting to draw her against his knees and kiss her—for the first time; but somehow he never dared to attempt it with Anna.

"I don't think it would be wonderful," said Anna steadily.

"Why not, little girl?"

"I think it would be just like hundreds and thousands of other marriages."

"And how are they?"

"Not fine enough."

"I would give you all I could. All I had would be yours. I should be yours. I should be just at your feet, little girl."

"I suppose," she said, "that my father said those things to my mother."

"You bet he did!"

"Ah, yes! Every man says them, and means them. Every woman believes them. And afterwards—they don't work out."

"Marry me and see."

"No, no!"

"You're afraid. But listen, little girl. You're a woman. A woman must just let herself go. Let yourself go, Anna. Try it! Lean on me! Let me kiss you!"

"No!"

"Is a kiss so much?"

"Kissing is the beginning of the end," said Anna wisely.

"But what an end!" said Silver with shining eyes.

"And you promised ——"

"I know I did, and—and I'll keep my word. But give me a few minutes more to say my say. I'm ambitious, Anna."

"So am I."

"I'm going to get on."

"I, too," said Anna seriously.

"You little girl, you can't! You won't! You only think it. Women—not one per cent. have the scope of a man. Couldn't you lean on me, help me, enjoy my success, share with me ——"

"I don't love you."

"I'd teach you."

"Every man thinks he can do that."

"What other man has been saying it to you?" said Silver. The veins swelled on his temples and neck.

She shook her head.

"You have me watching you all the time, remember," said Silver.

She sighed.

"Is it money you want?" he asked more tenderly. "Is it that sister of yours—that rich sister—who thinks she's going to put you in the way of a big marriage? Eh, Anna? Is that it?"

She shook her head again.

"Then, what?"

"Oh, how do I know? All I know is, I'm going up to the very top of the world, and I'm going to look around at all the kingdoms thereof—and choose mine! And it may not be money; it may not be—oh, how do I know what it will be?"

"The top of the world? I'll take you up there. Leave it to me."

"I have never met or seen a man who could take me up there."

He paused.

"The stew's hot enough," she said, and carried the steaming pan to the table.

"All the same," said Silver, half to himself, his shining eyes on her as she moved about, "I can't believe you couldn't, anyhow, be bought like other women, little Anna. Oh, the blasted rich! My Lord, how I hate 'em! You women, you want rich husbands; you think of your furs and your jewels. I don't blame you, you poor, soft things. It's been so from the beginning of the world. I wonder if the learning will be hard for you when the world's righted; when capital takes its place and no more; when labour takes its place and no less; when one woman won't have more diamonds than the next; and this man can't pay a bigger price than that one."

"You were addressing the fraternity again the other night?"

"I was. We had a fine evening. Grand! I wish you had been there. But women will never make good socialists. No; they come to the hand that feeds them."

"This is my party. You shan't be bitter."

"I'm not bitter, little Anna. But when I think of myself manager of that darned place and all the work and sweat I put into it, how it eats my time and my energy, and then think of that blighted young fool owning the whole box of tricks, spending the profits, yachting, travelling, hunting, what not—best wines, best cars, best o' everything—just because he was born right and dropped into it —— How I hate him!"

"Him? King Garnet?"

"H'm! They christened him pretty well. King Garnet, eh? Twenty-six, and been a millionaire five years now! Yes, he's due back home any time now, and you'll see him sailing through the works one day, snatching five minutes sometime between lunch here and dinner there; between a motor race and a squash rackets—and you'll see what women are then. You'll see all those girls of yours'll have waved their hair and put on their best blouses.

You'll hear 'em twitter when King Garnet's coming. You wait, my girl! You've never seen his lordship yet. He's been away on his yacht the last year, ever since you've been there as forewoman. But just you wait!"

"All right," said Anna, with her curly smile. "I'll wait, and I don't care how long."

"No man should have money he hasn't earned, Anna."

"No man's altruist enough to give it away and earn it back again."

"Come to one of our evenings at the fraternity and you'll think differently."

"Come to the table and have some of my supper," said Anna.

He got up. "If I had Garnet's money it would make a difference, Anna?"

"None to me," she answered, turning from his burning gaze.

He closed his hand tightly over her arm.

"Oh, it would, you woman! It would! But I don't want his money, see? I don't want it, even though ——" He dropped his voice. "I haven't been so far off having it—all of it—the Garnet money. Then where'd King be now, eh? Not where I am, take my word for that. No; a lad of his talents would be sweeping out my office." He sneered, "I'd like to have him do it! To sweep out my office!" His eyes laughed.

"You'll poison the food," said Anna.

"Let me kiss you, Anna. Make me better."

"No! Oh, no!"

"Very well. I will wait."

He sat down with hunched shoulders and brows drawn together; but he threw off the mood. Anna was gay; she made him gay too. It was more charming even than their little dinners in the Italian restaurants of Soho. She produced as the crowning surprise of the feast their favourite Chianti. The rough, red wine was, as always, nectar to their unmellowed palates; it brought colour to Anna's

cheek, gentleness to Silver's tongue. He ceased to revile life, to think his burning thoughts and hate his dark hatreds; he just loved the woman. And to have her thus alone in a little homely room, with singing fire, with food that she had prepared for him, in a gown that she obviously wore to please, was Paradise. Fed and warmed, his always irritable vanity soothed and flattered, his gratification was complete. He kissed her hand; he was amenable, obedient; he respected her; he worshipped her. His lover's hour was spiritual and all the happier for it.

The meal was over, the flask empty, the coffee made. They had washed up. The room was straightened, the fire replenished. He sat in the oak chair on the hearth, and Anna opened her piano.

"My most darling treasure," she said, caressing the lid with delicate finger tips as she lifted it. She sat down.

"My own. My beauty. I bought it myself. It's taken two years. There's only one instalment left now."

"Let me pay that," said Silver with sombre ecstasy.

She looked at him, smiled faintly, not replying. Her mere look was repudiation enough. Her hands wandered softly on the keys, seeking.

Silver had never heard Anna sing before. She had hummed little snatches from this song and that now and again, perhaps, as he walked home with her along the Embankment; he had thought her voice the most attractive voice in the world. No intimation of the velvet power and beauty of it had he yet received. But now, as he sat there beside the fire, stirred, gratified, dreaming, she began to sing. And with the first lifting of her voice subconsciously his arm went up. He reached the gas bracket by the mantel, turned the light out. His senses called, if not for darkness, for twilight. Now only the fire shone in the room.

Night of stars and night of love
Fall gently o'er the waters.
Heaven around, below, above,
No more we'll heed the shore ——

So Anna sang; and so, dreaming and gratified, Silver listened. He fixed his eyes on her sitting at the shining piano in the firelight. To him, all here was passionate and at the same time tranquil. He stretched his feet, leaned back in the chair. He felt that security which men of strong, over-bearing temper feel in pursuit of a woman. Demand for long enough, press hard enough, watch for her weakening, tempt her cunningly enough—he must get her. It seemed to him but just, equitable, reasonable, the only possible thing, that if such a man as he wanted such a woman as she so passionately, he must receive the gift of her. So he sat there, dreaming, possessive, hot triumphs swelling his heart, making his blood surge. Her beautiful voice made him proud. What a lover, what a mate, what a wife—this silver-throated, white-skinned girl, radiant and young, with thick, smooth hair, glossy as a bird's breast! She was going to be one of the many acquisitions which Bertie Silver meant to gather to himself; one of the many, but the biggest of all. His thoughts soared and flew; he was up in the windy spaces of his ambitions; and her voice sent him flying, soaring. While she sang, nothing seemed too difficult, too remote or too great for accomplishment. When she stopped, the exaltation passed, leaving only the mood of love. He got up and crossed the room to her.

"I didn't know," he said, finding words with difficulty—"didn't know that you sang like that. Thank you. I think I'm in heaven to-night."

She laughed; he edged beside her on the wide piano seat.

"Anna Land, you know I'm a hectoring, obstinate, overbearing sort of fellow."

He was a little proud of himself as he said it. Wasn't it well known that, secretly, women adored such men?

"And I want what I want when I want it; and when I go out to get a thing I get it if I break it pulling it home."

"Do you?" she said thoughtfully.

His heart beat thickly. His fingers burned on hers.

"Yes, that's me; and I'm going to get you, Anna."

She glanced sideways at his face, so near to hers. She was thinking of him: "Are you all empty sound and foolish violence, temper and brag? Or are you, perhaps, the man I'm supposing I'll find some day?"

She sighed.

He pressed on quickly: "But Anna, when I get you I'll be so good to you! You shall be happy. You shall be in ecstasy. When we are married you'll tell me so."

"We shall never be married."

"You've known for a long time that I loved you—for four months—all the time you've been at Garnet's. And we haven't quarrelled much, have we? You've liked being with me, those times that we dined together, when I've seen you home?"

"Yes, but I've told you honestly ——"

"A woman is never quite honest, my dear. She can't be. You can't mean they meant nothing to you, our evenings at Paolo's, and everything."

"They meant a good companion to me—talk——"

"But companionship, talk—those are nothing between a man and a woman. There must always be more—or less."

She sighed again.

"There was food."

"Food?"

"You don't think of it, but I do. I think of it always. My voice has got to be fed, so I've got to be fed. I can't afford Paolo's dinners. I've had to pay for this piano the last two years.

"Come! You don't tell me—you, a girl as alive, as vital as you are—that you came out with me for companionship, talk—and food! Food!"

"You won't believe it if I do tell you so."

"Anyway, Anna, my poor little Anna, I could always give you those things if we were married. Come to me for them, then."

She got up.

"No!"

They faced each other in the firelight across the piano stool. Silver's voice changed. A rasp came into it.

"You thwart me without thinking what you are doing."

"What am I doing?" Anna asked.

Silver hesitated.

"Some men ——" he began.

She waited, with a little sound of query.

"Don't make me say it," said Silver pausing.

'But say it, whatever it is."

'I don't mean to say that I am thinking of it this way so much as that some girls in your shoes would be thinking of it so," said Silver steadily. "What I mean to say is—well, I'm your boss, aren't I? Whom do you hold your job from if not from me?"

"You took me—chose me—out of half a dozen."

"I know I did. And—and you're fine, Anna. You have those girls licked into shape like no forewoman we ever had before. Such a thorough little woman you are. But just the same, you hold that job from me; I'm manager; and yet you—you—well, you have the nerve to—to turn me down stone cold. It takes a nerve, Anna, if you only think of it."

"I haven't so much as thought of it."

"No; no; you wouldn't. It's not in you to look at things that way. I don't mean exactly that I do either."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I ask you to think," said Silver doggedly.

"Well," said Anna, with a catch in her voice, "I know work's hard to get, and there are scores who'd like to step into my shoes to-morrow; but just the same there are jobs in this old city for girls who will do them."

"No! No! Stop!" said Silver in frenzied haste. "You know I don't mean anything; nothing like that. I only wanted you to look at the thing squarely, as other people would look at it; as other men would make you look at it. Not I, darling, not I. I love you too well for that."

He threw himself at her feet.

"Don't call me darling," said Anna urgently.

"We're alone." He kissed her wrists.

"That's why."

"Be more like other girls, sweetheart."

"I daren't."

"Why not? Why not?"

"I've got to keep hold of life pretty tight. I've got a fight before me."

"Fight! You! You don't need to fight. Set your little feet in the other women's footsteps, honey, and let yourself go."

"Don't call me honey—nor sweetheart."

"Just let yourself go. You're all right with me."

"Stop ——"

"That's more than you would be with most men, you know. I don't want to offend you—wouldn't for the world—but I'd just like you to look at the position as other people would; as other fellows would make you look at it if they'd got you here."

"Stop all that! Stop!"

"You let me come here ——"

"You asked to come; and you promised ——"

"Oh, hell! I know I promised," said Silver in a sullen voice, and he got to his feet again.

"You shan't come any more if you worry me."

"How independent you dare to be!"

"Yes, I dare to be independent!" she cried passionately. "I won't be driven. I won't be ordered. I won't be hustled, nor coaxed, nor hoodwinked, nor deceived. I can be driven and ordered and hustled in my working day. This is my evening. It's mine! This is my home that I pay for. Mine! You may threaten and remind me that you hold my job just between your finger and thumb. I'm not frightened."

"I don't want you to be. And I wasn't—I didn't—I just wanted you to see things ——"

"As other men would make me see them, eh? Men less noble than you? Not so chivalrous and kind-hearted? Well, if you're so much better than the rest, so much nobler and kinder and bigger, Mr. Silver, get back to that chair and stay there. And—and I'll stay here, thank you."

Silver walked in a sullen rage back to the hearth. He stood there a while in silence.

"You'll come round," he said presently. "Life'll be too much for you, by yourself. I've seen it often. A pretty girl starts off cocksure. The years go by. All around her she sees other pretty new girls starting off cocksure, full of bounce. In the end she sees the world is a pretty tight-fixed oyster and that it takes a man to get most of the pearls."

"Let us stop this," Anna whispered.

Silver replied slowly after a while, "Very well—for to-night."

"Sit down," said Anna.

She put her hands on the keys again. They were tremulous, a little. She felt not quite sure of herself. Was he, by any terrible chance, right? She began to sing.

Now and again she lifted her head to glance at him over the top of the piano. He sat, shoulders hunched, elbows on his knees, chin in his palms. The flames were busy over his dark and sallow face. She could see the gleam of his eyeballs and his knitted brows. He did not frighten her, but he was saturnine. His brooding seemed to darken the room. Some force that emanated from him touched her, closed in on her. She did not know that it was just the man force seeking for domination of the woman, but she felt its sure touch. For an instant the world loomed larger to her; too large to challenge; then she battled with this, shook it away. She lost herself in music.

Silver's momentary sway broke. The power that came out of him, reaching for her, was no worse than foam on the crest of a wave that came in and went back. Again only her own force impelled her; she felt strong and happy.

She sang. For an hour she sang, uninterrupted, and then suddenly ceased. She heard Silver sigh.

"Good-night," she said softly, kindly. "Go now."

Silver got up and went obediently to the dark corner for his coat and hat.

He drew near again, and stood close beside her as she still sat on the piano seat.

"You won't——" he whispered, bending down.

She shook her head.

"A good-night kiss isn't so much," said Silver wistfully.

"It's the beginning of the end," she repeated.

Silver turned away.

"After all," he said, "you're a real woman. You know that much. 'The beginning of the end.' You know that. Wish you didn't. Good-night. To-morrow morning seems a long while away."

"It will be here too soon," she answered.

"Not for me," said Silver. "Good-night again; and thank you, Anna. You're rather cruel——"

"Cruel to be kind," said Anna.

"Sort of kindness a man has no use for. But I say again, I've been in heaven to-night. Thank you."

He was gone. The darkness went from the little room. It was quiet again; homely and safe.

She sat thinking of Silver and confessing to herself. She confessed that when he had sat near her on the piano seat it had been no small temptation just to fall into his ready arms; to close her eyes; to be kissed; to leave to-morrow to take care of itself. But having weathered the temptation, she knew herself all the stronger for it. Yet she saw how easily and tragically women subside upon men, the wrong men, any men; how gently and imperceptibly the big mistakes of life can be made; how softly and naturally the big mistakes just happen.

And she thought of Lucia. Lucia had walked so daintily for nearly twenty years; fed so delicately, dressed so richly. Three men at least had loved her with passion

enough to make them dedicate their lives to her, even if, after the dedication, unlawfully they snatched those lives back. Yet what was there in Lucia's eyes? The same haggard patience that had invested their mother looked from Lucia's eyes.

Lucia was a beaten woman and knew it. Was that what her eyes said?

"It is a great life if you don't weaken," said Anna Land out loud to herself, and she struck two resolute chords like an amen.

She sang herself a lullaby, softly, tenderly, and knew in her heart an absurd desire that she was singing it to Lucia or to Silver.

As she thought of Silver she knew that she wished he were there at her feet, with his head against her knee—as, cunningly, he had laid it for a moment an hour ago, knowing woman's weakness of pity—while she sang the lullaby to him.

"We are very soft," she thought; "very, very soft." And she slipped off the piano seat, and enjoyed the last glow from the last embers of her fire.

But by the fire, too, she now felt solitary and sad.

"Don't weaken," she said to herself vehemently. So, just for a bracer, she went into her cold bedroom to undress, not allowing herself the warmth of the fading fire; and very regretfully—for, as Silver said, she was a real woman—she took off the black silk frock which she loved, and the sleek stockings which she loved better still, and laid them away with the bags of pot pourri, longing for the next time of wearing.

Lucia, so polished, so fine, was scented, furred, jewelled every day. She had paid her price and received the goods. Was the price so big?

"Don't weaken," murmured Anna to herself. But she fell asleep wrapped in dream luxuries all the same.

II.

Anna Land found a hectic confusion of mind prevailing among her subordinates next day. Old girls were imparting news to new girls; new girls became equally anticipatory. Their minds were not on their simple and mechanical work. They exchanged looks, appraising one another. In the lunch-room at mid-day the talk ran all on one topic. Anna, at her solitary table in a corner, caught fragments that floated solitarily to her through her preoccupation with last night. For she was preoccupied. Silver had left his violent impression on her mind. This morning she had scarcely seen him. He had been hovering about in the entrance, ostensibly for the purpose of finishing a cigarette before he went into the works, but really, as she knew, to catch a glimpse of her. They had exchanged smiles, his urgent, conciliatory; hers brief and cautious. She had hurried by him, just murmuring a reply to his half-entreating "Good-morning, Miss Land." To the half entreaty her murmured response did not reply at all. Later he had come to the door of the binding room, over which she reigned; but they had not spoken. Yet last night's impression was still clear. The human appeal he had made to her then still questioned a little the resolves that she wished to think immutable.

She could hear the girls speaking of King Garnet. Garnet was coming that afternoon. The news had flown round the great works, and concentrated and gained significance in the binding room. The little pale slips of girls were all alight. Their young giggles made gay the formal luncheon place. They were making surmises and seeing visions, all about King Garnet. The light of his presence was very bright to them. She herself thought reluctantly of Silver

After lunch, in the rest room, she saw the girls prinking in the mirrors; drawing worn and dingy powder puffs from

hiding places of stocking tops, waist belts, bosoms or pockets; this one borrowing from that one a touch of lip salve. Most of them pulled and tweaked their hair into little bushes over their ears.

She often thought of these girls tenderly. To-day she was sorry for them. Their prettiness so brief, their aims so short, their vision so dull, their scope so small—how pitiful! The passing of one careless young man through their afternoon was an event before which palled Cabinet crises, arson and suicide headlines, rumbles of world wars.

"What's the excitement?" she asked them, smiling.

"The boss is coming."

"Haven't you heard, Miss Land?"

"Mr. Garnet's back. Been all round the world on his yacht. And he's comin' to see us this afternoon."

"You seen him, Miss Land?"

"'Course she never. He's been away all the time she's been here; ain't he, Miss Land?"

"You should see him!"

"Some swank, Miss Land!"

"My! I should think so!"

"He's going to marry a titled lady."

"That's only what they say. Sometimes they marries beneath 'em; j-j-just anybody; you never know."

"I should say we've all got a chance, 'cording to you!"

Giggles.

"My chance's goin' for frippence. Any takers?"

Giggles.

"'S two o'clock. My word, how the time goes, talkin'!"

They were back at work. All the machines were going, all the girls monotonously attending their work, when King Garnet came in.

Anna Land, standing beside a binder at which worked a new recruit, at the far end of the room, saw him come in. Silver was by his side, walking softly, saturninely obsequious. She could imagine how the dark ironies of

Silver's mind worked at this moment. She looked with attentive eyes at Garnet, away on the other side of the large room. Even at that distance she saw him smiling, light, care-free, a big young man with all the arrogant ease of inherited riches upon him.

He stopped to speak to the first girl at the first machine. Far away her delight was a visible quality. He laughed, nodded and passed on. He attended, in a dilettante way, to the details which Silver was thrusting insistently upon him.

"It's nothing to him," Anna told herself, watching. "All this place, built and planned so carefully for his future use, all this hive of us—it's all nothing to him but the means whereby he lives. He doesn't want to come here, doesn't want to look, doesn't want to trouble. Nothing matters to that kind of man but his fun. That he's got to have. Damnable!" she thought. "Damnable!"

She saw the many silly heads turning after him as he progressed.

Twenty yards from her, pausing to speak smilingly to a fluttered girl, he caught the figure of Anna Land. He turned quickly and looked at her. They looked at each other for perhaps two seconds.

"Our new forewoman, Miss Land," said Silver in a very quiet, harsh voice in Garnet's ear.

Garnet glanced round at him and saw him strangely at tension; in that instant, for the first time, he felt the measure of his manager's hostility. He regarded him attentively for a moment. He was amazed. He looked back at Anna.

"A good forewoman?" he asked easily.

Silver nodded. "You'll speak to her?"

"Present me," said Garnet.

Silver laughed his very quiet, harsh laugh.

"You don't need to be presented to your forewoman, sir. She can come to you."

He made a sign and Anna moved forward. But King Garnet met her.

"Miss Land?"

"Yes, Mr. Garnet."

"I've been hearing about you—your splendid qualities—from our friend here," said Garnet mendaciously.

Silver looked at him darkly.

"I have just told Mr. Garnet you are very capable, Miss Land."

"Thank you, Mr. Silver," said Anna.

"Are you happy here? Comfortable? You find things—er—all right?" Garnet asked, with a charming air of apology for his vagueness.

"I like the job very much, Mr. Garnet."

"If you wouldn't mind taking me round your room we could release Silver. I've seen all the rest, Silver—all I'm going to see to-day anyway."

"I can stay with you, sir."

"I needn't keep you, Silver. All I want to do now is just to have a few words with Miss Land about the woman's side of the place. Thanks, Silver; thanks for—er—wasting your time with me. 'Fraid it is just a waste of time when I come here." He laughed. Holding out his hand, he added easily, "Good-bye, Silver."

Anna Land stood observing the two men. At last Silver took the hand, saying nothing, and he imparted nothing to the handshake which Garnet bestowed. But as he turned away he gave Anna a look, and she saw in the dark dens of his eyes wild things unfathomable. She caught her breath and, stealing a look at Garnet, saw that he watched Silver away, down the aisles of benches and machines, out of the room. But Garnet was insolently good-humoured, inclined to laughter. He thought he now understood.

"What is this?" he said. "Mayn't I talk to you?"

"I suppose you may if you wish, Mr. Garnet. You're master here."

"Ah, but don't put it like that—if you please! Can't we stand a little away from this noise? Over there? If you don't mind." They withdrew to the only empty

space in the room, directly under the high windows. "I think I have offended Silver, eh?"

"But how?"

"By wanting to talk to you."

She said very coldly, "What nonsense!"

King Garnet knew the inflections of women's voices well. He was a young man—only twenty-six—and idle; but there were some things he had not been too idle to study assiduously.

"Perhaps I have made a mistake," he said. "What I really want you to do if you can spare time is to tell me if the conditions here are all right for the girls; and so on and so forth, you know. Are there any improvements you would wish?"

Having given her her subject, he was able to watch her while she talked. She was obliged to talk, because he had asked her to. And he looked—unobtrusively, because of the coldness of her voice—at her hair and her eyes, full of damped-down fires ready to blaze any time, and her slim, lithe figure and her narrow, expressive feet. They were dancing feet, he thought; and he thought too, "I shall ask her out one night to dance. I could take her somewhere or other. She's a rather wonderful girl."

And when she stopped her dispassionate summary of her subject he said absently and softly:

"So everything's satisfactory. I'm glad. Knew I could rely on Silver, as a matter of fact."

Silver's exhibition of hatred had gone from his mind; it was immaterial anyway. "But now, about you. It seems, if you'll allow me to say so, a queer thing for a girl like you to be working in a place like this."

She looked at him frankly but cautiously.

"I mean," he hastened to add, "it's an unattractive environment, isn't it? I suppose, however, that you make up for it in the week-ends and evenings."

"The week-ends and evenings console one quite a lot." But her smile was sphinx-like.

"What do you do with your evenings?"

"You would hardly believe me if I told you that I usually stay at home."

"But, of course, I should believe anything you say. And, of course, if you have a home——"

She did not fill in the pause.

"With your parents—why——" He paused again.

"No," she said, "I haven't any parents. I live on my own. But it's home just the same."

"Why not? But how do you occupy yourself? Isn't it dull?"

"Oh, I—I sing a little. I have a lot of practising to do."

"You mean you want to take up singing as a career? I know you mean that! How splendid! I knew this wasn't your *métier*."

He saw that her cheeks had coloured and her eyes smouldered with enthusiasm that she could not hide, and he pressed on quickly with the little advantage.

"I say, couldn't I hear you sing one day?" She hesitated. "I mean, I have a good many musical friends. But couldn't I hear you, one evening, alone, first?"

Still she hesitated.

"Please don't doubt my *bona fides* so palpably," he said, laughing and cajoling.

"I am sorry I doubt them palpably."

King Garnet started.

"But—but you doubt them?"

"Well, I mean——"

"You mean?"

"I mean what life has taught me——"

"Of course, you're a very pretty girl, an amazing girl."

Her face hardened.

"You don't allow me to say that?"

"I think, Mr. Garnet, that between employer and employed the attitude should be strictly businesslike."

" But when you have been businesslike all day, surely you can relax afterwards."

" Sometimes, in some cases. Is there anything else you want to ask me ? "

" I only want to ask you about yourself."

" Those are the questions I shall have no time to answer."

King Garnet was baffled and astonished.

" Hang it ! " he said to himself. " I have made all the necessary apologetics and I haven't approached so very quickly, said so very much, considering what the position is, and she gives me the frozen shoulder as if I were the butcher's boy ! "

" You are awfully hard on me," he said aloud, challenging her with half-laughing eyes. But she read his surprise in them.

" What does that matter to you ? " she replied.

" It always matters to a man, directly he can't get what he wants. Till he gets it, nothing else is worth a cent. And I want to hear you sing."

" No, you don't," said Anna, moving away to her recruit again.

King Garnet was left under the high windows, a little amused, most surprised, highly piqued and very eager. He sighed, smiled and went out. His car was waiting for him. He got in and took the wheel from his chauffeur, and as he let in the clutch something drew his eyes, impelled him to look round. Silver was watching him steadily over the wire blind of the office on the ground floor. For two seconds the men stared at each other before the car began to move. Then Garnet nodded, smiled and settled back to drive.

" Hang the lowering brute ! " he said to himself. " Jealous, of course ! "

And he drove off, thinking of Anna. She had so intrigued him in her implacable coolness that he could not dispel the image of her, standing before him, so unadorned, and yet, somehow, so triumphant. He was still considering her

when, fifteen minutes later, he walked into his mother's drawingroom and found her sitting before her low tea table set with frail china, polished silver and half a dozen edible delicacies. She was leaning back in a thickly padded armchair upholstered in amber satin ; the lights in the room were amber shaded ; her tea gown was of supple gold tissue ; her graying hair was touched skilfully with gold ; there were chrysanthemums and roses in every available space.

Lady Mabel Conway, equally *soignée*, but twenty years younger, was with her. King Garnet walked, for the first time a little critically, into this soft world to which he belonged.

" Here you are, darling," his mother murmured.

" Here I am, old dear."

He squeezed Mabel's little hand, and the empty spaces of her pale-gray eyes filled, and her pale lips grew pink and began to smile. He dropped into a chair beside her.

" You went to the works ? " said his mother languidly, pouring his tea.

" Oh, tell me all about it ! " added Mabel, a little eager yearning note in her voice.

" There isn't much to tell. The old place looked as beastly as usual ; Silver took me round. Sour brute that is, mother. I've half a mind——"

" No, my darling boy, no ! It was your father's wish that he should have the place, and the trustees always said that he was an excellent man and did his duty most ably. I have asked you a dozen times to let things alone."

" Hang it all, old dear, the show is mine ! "

" Now, to oblige me, King, don't be difficult."

" When am I ever difficult, my dear old dear ? My good nature is my curse and always has been. Only I do like to see bright and beaming faces around, and that surly brute Silver annoys me."

" Leave him alone, King."

" Oh, I shall leave him alone, as I've always done.

I've said for the last five years that I'd kick him out and I've never done it. How he hates me ! "

" Hates you ? " in a surprised pipe from Lady Mabel.

" Murder me cheerfully, my dear, Silver would, if no one was looking. However, after all, what does he matter ? . . . They've got twenty or thirty girls working in the binding room now, mother, with a fine little forewoman over them. A great girl."

" Take me round the place some time, King," said Mabel.

" It would bore you stiff."

She smiled. " I should love it."

" Some day, if you really want to," said King negligently. " I don't exactly haunt the place myself, but we can arrange a ceremonial visit for you one day ; cheering workers, and the youngest presenting a bouquet. Is that your idea of a fitting reception, Mabel ? "

She flushed crimson, her eyes shining. He had spoken in lazy jest ; she saw the little scene in earnest—cheering workers, presentation of bouquet—what did they mean but that she went to the Garnet Printing Works as the future bride—— Then suddenly he saw all that worked in her simple and kind young mind. He was not ready for such consequences. He had a long life to live yet in the same carefree way that he lived it now. He meant nothing—nothing ! He did not look at her as he laughed and replied :

" I was rotting, of course. Mother'll drive you down one day when you're out shopping, won't you, mother ? And I could meet you there—or Silver will deputise. He's much abler than I."

" But I shouldn't like him if he hated you, King."

" Isn't she dear, mother ? You are a dear, Mabel, to take up the sword like that. And by the way, what about to-night ? "

He had telephoned her that morning, asking her to dine and dance. His mother had pestered him into it.

" I'd love to come, King. I couldn't answer quite

certainly when you 'phoned, because I had to get out of a dinner with some relations. But now I have cut the dinner and I can come ! " Her pleasure was apparent.

" Isn't she a dear, mother ? Now, isn't she—to give 'em the go-by and come out on the binge with me ? We'll go to the Legation Club, shall we, Mabel ? You like it ? "

" I love it, King."

He thought of something pleasing to say—a demand to make perhaps. A demand from him of her would be a very pleasing thing.

" Wear that little blue frock with the dewdrop sort of girdle that you wore here the other night."

Joy flamed high in Lady Mabel's face. She did not know that he did not care if she wore the little blue frock or any other one of her many expensive, ineffectual creations ; or that he merely made a graceful habit of remembering women's toilets.

" I will," she promised, fluttering. " Of course, I will. Did you—did you really like it ? "

" I thought it jolly."

" The lines or the—the colour ? "

" All of it. Wasn't it a jolly frock, mother ? "

" Sweet, Mabel," said Mrs. Garnet languidly.

" I'll go now," said Lady Mabel. " I really must go. Good-bye, dearest." She kissed Mrs. Garnet. " You'll be calling for me, King——"

" At eight."

He walked out with her to her car and put her in. He squeezed her hand again ; it was such a little appealing hand. He knew that she drove away unreasonably happy, and his mind misgave him a little, but not for long. Life was too good, too much fun. He went back to his mother and found her still reclining in the amber chair. Her faded eyes regarded him.

" Come and sit down, King, and have some more tea. You needn't rush away yet ; it isn't time to dress and

your letters can wait, and you needn't 'phone anyone about anything."

"You take all a man's means of exit away from him, old dear." He sat down, laughing.

"King, I wish you wouldn't raise that old question of Silver. It's nonsense to think he doesn't like you. The man has an ungracious manner."

"A darned ungracious manner."

"Well, you'll leave it alone for good and all, please, dear boy. Your father wished Silver to stay as long as he wanted to."

"Why, mother ? "

"How do I know why, dear boy ? It was a wish of your father's."

She leaned back in the chair, out of the direct range of shaded lights.

"Some little mystery about Silver, old dear. Always has been."

"If there is I don't know it."

She played with the fringes of her gown.

"Well, let it go," said King. "I am all for peace—and plenty, mother. Always plenty." He lighted a cigarette and held the box towards her, but she shook her head restlessly.

"I'm glad you're taking Mabel out to-night, dear boy."

"I know you are, old dear ! It's due to your wretched machinations that I'm doing it."

"I'm sure I don't know why you need me to prod you into paying a little ordinary attention to a dear, sweet, nice girl like Mabel. A dear, sweet, nice girl, King."

"Oh, mother, what a recommendation ! Damns the poor girl for ever."

'The kind of girls you play about with, King——"

"Now, mother, you don't know 'em, so you can't judge 'em."

"I can judge you," said Mrs. Garnet in her frail, pettish voice ; "you're my son. Why don't you consider marrying

dear little Mabel ? She's in love with you." King moved uncomfortably. "That's something," said Mrs. Garnet. "All the other girls you know and play about with would only be marrying you for your money."

"You're not a nice, fond, proud mother at all. What about my beauty ? "

She disregarded him.

"Mabel is a very rich woman, too, King. And apart from that, she would make you very happy."

"I couldn't be happier than I am, mother, thanks. As for money, haven't we enough ? You're not exactly in rags, are you ? " He stroked the gold gown affectionately.

"Don't be childish, my dear. Two fortunes are better than one. And you and Mabel——"

She paused.

"Old dear ? "

"——are so perfectly and wonderfully suited to each other."

He laughed.

"Rot, old lady ! You're telling fibs and you know it. And, anyway, life's a long and hilarious business. I don't want to throttle it down yet. Mabel will easily pick some decent chap—steady and quiet and affectionate and all that—who'll make her awfully happy—fifty per cent. happier than I ever could."

"You could make a woman very happy, King. You have gifts."

"But the point is, I wouldn't make a woman happy, old dear. It would have to be an extraordinary woman to make me want to marry."

"Men don't want to marry, King. They do it all the same."

"Some escape, mother." He laughed, and went out.

All the evening he danced with Lady Mabel. In the car on her way home he kissed her hand—from habit. He was careful not to kiss her lips, though that, too, was a habit, in a dark car, on a girl's way home, through darkening

streets. But with a mere kiss on the hand Mabel was very content. He left her on her doorstep, all her dreams of him smiling on her mouth.

He gave her not a thought after he had got back into the car. When he reached home and went into the smoke-room and sat down by the fire with a whiskey and soda, the house dead quiet, the night half gone, he was thinking of a pair of steady eyes, of a smooth and proud head, of a voice cool as water and rich as music.

"I believe I've had the luck to meet the finest girl in the world," he thought.

He could not recall ever thinking quite that before. The certainty which he felt about her was new to him. There had been girls before, many girls, who had caught his vagrant fancies, kissed and laughed, or kissed and cried, cost him much money; but they were far phantoms. Anna Land was the only vision who sat with him on the hearth that night.

III.

Anna had a letter from Silver the next morning, brief and crude. It stated, with all the violence a few words could muster, that he should wait for her to walk home with her that night. She did not want Silver, arguing her hoarse, with his distressful angers, and the pressing, pressing, pressing all the while of his passion upon her. These things wearied. But as she made no reply, when she came out of the works there he was in the February evening fog, the collar of his old mackintosh turned up and the brim of his soft dark hat pulled down, looking more revolutionary than ever. What he had to say was reproachful and bitter.

He held her elbow in a close grasp, a device she hated; but he looked in a mood physically to wrestle with her this

evening if she gainsaid him, so she made no dispute. As soon as they were away from the looming shadow of the great building, he began :

" Well, you've got away with it, have you ? For all your quietness and pride, for all the way you've kept me off. You don't mind getting well away with your chances when you do meet some worth-while fellow, eh, Anna ? It is easy for you to say that money means nothing to you, my dear ; easy for you to turn down a poor man at the same time that you make these highfaluting statements. But what are you doing ? Answer me that ! "

" I don't know why I should answer anything," said Anna, roused to anger ; " but I repeat that other people's money means nothing to me."

" A-ha ! "

" And it never will. Oh, men and their money ! Men and their money ! I'll make my own."

" You won't do that ; but what you will do is to be tempted when the first rich man comes along——"

They walked fast, Anna setting the pace.

" Of whom exactly are you speaking ? "

" You know," said Silver ; and he tried to say the name and actually could not. She said it for him.

" If all this ridiculous fuss is over Mr. Garnet, and the few words he spoke to me yesterday——"

" Fuss and few words ! I was sent off ignominiously "— his passion choked him for a moment—" so that he could say his say to you. What did he want ? "

" He wanted to ask me if the girls were happy and comfortable, and so on."

" A-ha ! "

" He wanted to hear my ideas on the employment of girls, and so on."

" Aha ! Awfully good ! Do you suppose that was what he wanted to hear ? "

" He said so."

" Do you know King Garnet's one of the fastest men

about town ? All he cares for girls is whether they can attract him enough to minister to his pleasures. That's all he's thinking of. That's all he's worrying about where you are concerned. Do you tell me you don't know it ? "

She was too angry to reply.

" Or perhaps you do know it, and perhaps you're cleverer than I credited you with being, Anna. You quiet, steady women are devils sometimes. Perhaps you do know Garnet's after you—as he's been after dozens of other poor fools, God help 'em—and perhaps you aren't going to be a poor fool. Perhaps you're too clever for that. That is, no doubt, where I've got my ideas of you all wrong—my high ideas of you, my beautiful ideas ; it's nothing to some of you women to drag a man's ideals into the mud for the sake of filthy damned money ! "

He waited and glanced sideways at her to see if he was not goading her into speech ; but she kept silence, and presented to his seeking gaze a stony profile.

He rushed on : " Yes, perhaps that's where I've summed you up all wrong ; and where he's summed you up all wrong too. You mean to egg him on and play him and play him till at last he's so mad for you that he'll marry you. You want to be Mrs. King Garnet, eh, Anna ? A lofty purpose, my girl ! A fine, beautiful aspiration ! I suppose that's about as much principle as women have though. Women are bodies, not souls. They suffer no more than cats do ! "

His voice went into a falsetto and broke. She could feel how he trembled, from the unsteadiness of his grasp on her arm. Yet somehow she could not be very sorry for him. She hated at once his boiling rage and the weakness of his attack.

Since she did not speak, Silver kept silence, too, for a little while. They walked on. Then he wiped his face, down which sweat trickled, and said in a steadier voice, but still roughly :

" I have my reasons for my feelings, Anna ; reasons

good enough for some men to murder a man. Yes," he said under his breath, " some men would murder him. See here——" He paused, drawing her to a standstill, too, and looked into her face. They were now under a lamp, dim in the fog; but it showed to each of them, blurredly, the other's face. " See here! Being Mrs. King Garnet mightn't be quite the big thing you think it would. Time may show us something, and—and precious little time may show it too. There's no knowing what is going to turn up. I'm at work," he uttered abruptly. " At work at last," he went on darkly, drawing her with him.

Her anger evaporating, she cared so little about any of this that she remained serene. What she was actually thinking was: " If he wants to come in, and comes in, or argues on the doorstep a long while, he'll make me miss half an hour's practice." She fretted, but patiently.

" You are very quiet," said Silver by and by, almost timidly, for in a way her mute strength awed him. " You are extremely angry with me, Anna? "

" No."

" Then what are you thinking? "

She told him.

" Always your music! " he said jealously. " Curse it! Curse anything that comes, anyhow, between you and me! Just for to-night, dear girl, forego it! Just for to-night! You can't sing with this fog in your throat. You're looking tired too. It'll be no good to you. Let us drop in at Paolo's and get our usual table and have dinner together, and a flask of Chianti. It would do you good."

" But I want to go home and practice."

" I tell you with this fog in your throat——"

" You may be right there," said Anna, for, indeed, she was tired, and now they were not far from Paolo's; a turn to the right and a turn to the left would bring them within sight of his white door, with the potted shrub on either side, and Paolo himself not far inside the threshold, welcoming patrons in.

"Oh, do come," said Silver; "just to forgive me for all I've said," he prayed.

He persuaded her a little more, and then they went towards Paolo's.

The little restaurant was very warm and steamy and savoury. It was bright, with a red flower and a bit of fern in a vase on each table, and the lights were red-shaded. The waiters were Italian, meek and tactful. Anna and Silver entered.

Paolo flourished a glad hand towards them and bowed low. He escorted them to their corner table.

"I felt," he said with admiration for Anna, "that the signorina would come to-night. A bad night, eh?"

He indicated the fog creeping even into the restaurant, and handed the menu. When Anna had chosen, and Paolo had gone away, she looked up to find Silver regarding her very tenderly and humbly across the table.

"I am sorry," he said almost inaudibly.

She could do no less than smile faintly; but she could do no more. His tempestuous moods had no power to touch her. His rages and instabilities alienated her respect. But there were things he did for which she was grateful; he looked after her most tenderly, if jealously; he rose and lifted her shoddy overcoat from her shoulders and laid it over the back of her chair as if it had been a cloak of ermine; and his passion for her was for the girl unadorned, the tired girl as she sat before him in her knitted working frock and with shadows under her eyes. She was not unappreciative of this.

Before the soup came he leaned across to ask her, "There's one more question, though. He—he—came to see you to-day?"

"No."

"Well, he called at the works."

"I didn't see him."

"You didn't?"

"I didn't."

"Pardon my insistence, Anna. If you knew what I felt—— Still, he—he called at the works and asked the doorkeeper for your address."

"For my address! How do you know that?"

"Do you dream for a moment that I shouldn't find it out?"

He smouldered at her.

"If he dares to come hanging round after you——"

"My fortress is pretty impregnable," said Anna, curling her lip.

"Yes," said Silver in rather a lighter voice. "I found that out, didn't I?"

The soup came; the Chianti was poured; they were fed and warmed. Life for both became imperceptibly but beautifully rosier.

An hour and a half later—they had lingered long in the warmth and talked a great deal—Silver saw her home and said good-bye to her on her doorstep.

She went up the dark staircase to her rooms. The sittingroom, too, was dark; but in the velvet blackness was something which stole out to assail her subtly and mysteriously—the scent as if of a whole garden of flowers. When she had groped for the matches in their accustomed place on the mantelpiece she saw—and gasped for joy. The table was massed with roses; they had been thrust into two washing bowls by her landlady; and there they were, scores of great, beautiful, pink, cream, crimson heads, scenting the whole room. Her heart missed a beat and ran on double time. She thought briefly, "Lucia? . . . No!" She was at the table, lifting out handfuls of roses and putting her face into them.

"Silver is a l-l-l-liar," she said faintly.

IV.

The next day being Saturday and a half-holiday, Anna went, in the afternoon, to see Lucia. She found Lucia, who was expecting her and had issued the mandate, "Not at home to anyone else," trying on new boudoir caps. Lucia was not dressed. She had been dancing all night, she said; had got to bed at five, not slept a wink, risen at two in the afternoon, bathed and put on a *peignoir* over her impalpable underwear. Thus she received Anna, looking a hothouse flower much the worse for wear. She pulled on the chosen cap and let the lace frill kindly shadow her already shadowed eyes.

The sisters had tea beside the fire in Lucia's rose-coloured bedroom.

"Don't look at me like that," said Lucia, creaming the tea richly. "You remind me too much of little Anna staring at me over a bed-rail when I dressed for parties in a room I never want to remember again. Your eyes are just as big and just as steady and speculative. And at my age," she laughed wearedly, "one doesn't like it."

"You're looking lovely, Lucia," said Anna.

"Clothes, my child, clothes. I am feeling wearier than death. I went to Mürren, thinking of taking a fresh-air rest cure; but where does one get a rest cure these days? Life's a fever. I shall go to Cannes for a few weeks at the end of the month, I think; just for March and April. But now, my child, tell me all about you."

"There is never anything to tell about me. I don't go to Mürren or Cannes; or dance, or dine—at least nowhere except at Paolo's or in Soho."

"Little fool! But perhaps you have been thinking."

"I often think," said Anna.

"Thinking over what I said to you the other day. Has

it made any difference to your point of view? Have I given you a little wisdom?"

"Nothing will change me," said Anna. "I have decided, Lucia, and I shall go on."

"At least, then, if I haven't any influence over you, child, that man hasn't either."

"Silver?"

"Is that the name of the creature—the seedy revolutionist person with the morbid face? My dear, how can you stand such men?"

"After all, Lucia," said Anna, "that's much the same kind of man we were brought up among—certainly no worse."

"I've forgotten them," Lucia murmured. "I intended to forget and I've done it."

"Oh, Lucia, have you forgotten the grocer's assistant and the bank clerk, and mother's height of social ambition for you—the curate—all running after you like little dogs for you to kick? There was our poor music master too—seedier far than Silver. Silver isn't seedy, you know; it's only his mind that sprouts like weeds. But those old days, Lucia—have you really forgotten them? How wonderful you seemed to me—the grown-up you; with even then the gift for clothes, Lucia—you always had that—and your assurance and self-certainty and sparkle. Oh, how wonderful you were!"

Lucia's eyes grew momentarily bigger under the shadow of the lace cap.

"Do you remember how I used to ask to be allowed to clean your white dance shoes with benzine? You let me. What an honour for a four-year-old! And that night when you went to a dance with Charlie Abrams, and came home with Fred de Beck!"

"Yes, with Fred," said Lucia, "and I married him in a month, didn't I? It's a marvellous thrill for a poverty-stricken, ambitious girl when she first sees the big chance right under her nose, Anna." She gazed at Anna. "Yes,

perhaps I do remember just that. After all, it affected my whole afterlife. How could I forget? I do remember managing to lose that funny Abrams young man, and coming home in a car instead of the workman's early train."

Her eyes grew wide and dreamy.

"The first taste!" she mused. "The first taste of all a woman wants!"

Anna sat looking into the red fire. The rose room was very quiet, very soft. The curtains were drawn upon the February early darkness, the shaded lights poised dreamily over the two sisters. And there was a scent of roses from Lucia's dressing table that made Anna remember the roses she had left behind at home. The roses brought her into a sort of delighted spiritual contact with Lucia and her luxuries. They crept insidiously into her heart and brain.

"I am going to have it, too, Lucia," she said presently.

A little alertness came into the slack lines of Lucia's figure; a smile of understanding into her eyes.

"You will be a fool if you don't," she replied.

But Anna's brain was not running on Lucia's track at all.

"Yes, Lucia, I, too, will have all a woman wants. Do you remember eighteen years ago how you used to sit on my bed and talk to me about what you would have some day—the jewels you'd choose, the car you fancied—everything like that, Lucia, dear? I used to listen and wonder and admire and believe. You used to let your hair down to show me how long it was."

"I've had it bobbed since, and grown it again—all it will grow."

"You had no one else to say such things to at home. Mother was afraid to listen. Do you remember how she always frowned, with a scared look in her eyes, and shut you up?"

"So small, but so grim, mother was."

"Not really grim; only afraid; afraid we girls would want all the things she thought we could never have."

"Yes, because we had never had them. So she tried to make us grim too." Lucia laughed and stretched her arms. "If she'd only known how impossible that was! An example like hers makes young girls terrified of being forced to follow it."

"She was more brave than grim, Lucia."

"Isn't it the same—for a woman? That sort of undeviating stiffness and Spartan morality?"

"People need to be pretty brave, I think," said Anna. "Haven't you ever in your life needed all the courage you could lay hands on?"

Lucia shrank back a little into her chair. She put her hands on her silk-covered breast. Bleak memories touched her eyes. Then she smiled again easily, stretching out to the fire one thin foot, bare save for the satin mule hanging by a toe-cap.

"*Tout passe*," she answered.

"Perhaps," said Anna; "but there's always a to-morrow."

"Not always," said Lucia, with her smile dying out again like a summer leaf dying under a frost.

Anna fell sympathetically silent. As a little girl of four she had felt very tender towards Lucia; very anxious for her welfare and good fortune; longing for Lucia to attain that worldly happiness which she so frantically feared to miss. Eighteen years later, here she was, feeling just the same, tender and anxious for Lucia, longing for her to keep always that fleeting happiness which was all that she had plucked. But the woman Anna, so much wiser than the child, saw Lucia with open and pitiful eyes, and knew that her soul was near death, and that a very little time might see the *coup de grace*. For Lucia had laid up for herself no treasures, and her snatching hands often came back to her fluttering breast empty.

"There's a long time for you," said Lucia presently.

"I have an idea," Anna protested, "that life can be equally beautiful at all ages."

Lucia laughed.

" That's only a rumour," she said, laughing again, tired and resentful.

" Besides," said Anna quickly, laying a hand on her sister's knee, " you have a lovely time, Lucia ; the kind of time you used to envy. Last night you were at a party, for instance."

" The Moulton-Yorkes."

They were social names to Anna.

" And you danced. You used to love dancing."

" I still love dancing."

Anna nodded. There was a silence.

" I am only forty-two," said Lucia after a moment.

" What's forty-two ? "

Lucia leaned forward, holding Anna's hand that lay on her knee.

" But there is a difference," she said hesitating.

" Difference, Lucia ? "

" Some women wear so well. If a woman is very robust and at the same time doesn't run to fat—that's fatal, of course—and if she's comfortably off, can rest a lot and have her hair done and her manicure and pedicure regularly, and if she's very clever with clothes—she needs to be cleverer and cleverer with clothes as the years go on—but if she's all that, then she's pretty well the same at forty-two as she was at thirty-two, or—or even twenty-two. Just as attractive anyway."

" But of course, dear."

" It's not ' but of course ' at all," she said fretfully. " I—I am not a robust sort of woman ; not hard as nails. Some women wilt easily ; I do. There is a difference."

" But, Lucia, you love life ; you love going out ; you know you do."

" Yes. But—that party last night. Of course, women go with their own partners nowadays. Who—who are mine ? "

"Your partners, Lucia?"

Lucia was staring into the fire.

"Who are they, I say, n-n-nowadays? Sometimes an old man to whom I'm a still young, pretty woman, at my best. Generally young men, very young men—empty pockets; film-actor type or—or obscure young actors who like to have the run of a comfortable house and a good table, and—and be taken to places where they wouldn't otherwise go. They hang around me for that kind of thing now—that kind of lad. I must have someone to escort me; can't go unattended everywhere. I've been used to attention all my life." She stirred in her chair.

"I've seen it happen with other women—when there were always real men about me, you know; I've laughed at other women so often for having to take just what they could get. Suddenly one day, a week ago, I was so tired of everyone—these callous boys fetching and carrying for one, for their pickings—I thought, 'I'll get rid of the lot!' Then I thought, 'There will be no one left!' And, Anna, there wouldn't be." Her lips drooped and trembled, her face puckered. "I am one of the women I used to laugh at so often, and it seems such a short while ago."

"Oh, Lucia!"

"You see, I—I wilt easily; always did; never had much stamina. Fragility is so attractive when one is young. Fragility gets—gets haggard."

"You ought to rest more."

"I don't want to rest."

"Lucia, dear!"

"Life is very empty, Anna. It's a beautiful road"—she shook her head—"but so short."

"Not so short as that."

"Yes, Anna, as short as that." Her face puckered.

"And yet you try to make me——"

"It's the only way for a woman. What other way is there then?"

"I shall try my way," said Anna steadily. "You chose

yours, Lucia. You've had it; you have it still. All the lovely things you've got"—her look wandered around the room—"it's extraordinary to see you here, and remember the little you had only eighteen years ago."

"Yes! Yes!" cried Lucia. "But why can't one have more? I want more!"

"I think one can't have everything, Lucia."

"But one wants everything, Anna! Everything! Yes, and when one is young and loved, and admired as I've been, men make one think one has everything too. Each of them, and—and I'm not speaking only of my husbands, Anna"—her mouth twisted—"said to me, 'You shan't have a wish ungratified.' It's a formula, I think. But now—now there doesn't seem in my heart a wish that is satisfied."

"Satisfaction is pretty hard to get, I think."

"But here are you setting out to find it in your queer way."

"I want the best in the world."

"I had it!" said Lucia.

And then her eyes lighted with secret pride, and her mind went back over the years; and Anna, looking into her sister's face, saw hectic, happy, transient raptures pass into it and out of it, and heard her sigh.

"I had it," she repeated.

"I am going to make my way," said Anna, "and I will walk alone till I have made it. I will not take anyone's hand; nor drag at anyone; nor put my hand in anyone's pocket. I won't go any way, Lucia, just because it's easiest. No one shall persuade me nor cajole me nor trick me into thinking I have anything that I haven't got."

"Wait!" said Lucia.

"It may take me years——"

"Years won't do it."

"But if it's all my life I'll spend all my life trying for it. I will succeed; but I will buy my success myself, and then I shall belong to me; I'll be my very own. And then, at

the top, Lucia, I'll stand and look round and see the kingdoms of the earth spread before me."

"And you'll choose yours. You've said it before. You little fool! You little fool!"

"There are fools and fools, Lucia."

"You mean—I am one."

Anna got to her feet.

"Well," said Lucis, with her little twisted smile, "I've had eighteen good years."

"There are many more, Lucia dear."

"You're not going, Anna? Why are you standing up?"

"I'm going to practice the whole evening."

"How you believe in yourself!"

"So did you."

"Yes, and I could tell you the fallacy of it all in the mood I'm in this afternoon." She seized the silver tea-kettle as if galvanized to sudden action. "It's only a mood, of course. It will pass. *Tout passe.* But don't go, Anna. Sit down and we'll have fresh tea and cigarettes. I've a great deal of time to waste." She rang for more tea.

"A few minutes more, then, Lucia."

"And I'll be cheerful. Some day, Anna, you must come and sing when I have a party. It might do you good. Have you a frock to wear?"

"Not what you call a frock."

"You can wear one of mine. . . . More tea, Marie."

The little French maid, very suave, very smiling, went out with the teapot.

"I shall go to Cannes," said Lucia. "I have quite decided now. I am too mopy for words. It's stagnation. One should move about. I was very bored at Mürren."

"What did you do?"

"Whatever there was to do."

"Why don't you do some work, Lucia?"

"Work!"

"Philanthropic work; unpaid work. There is plenty for rich women like you. Why don't you do it?"

Lucia was quiet for a while. A shiver ran over her.

"Not yet," she said. "Not yet." She smiled ironically. "I've seen women come to it, though; many women; and I've laughed more or less compassionately." Her brooding mood fell again. "I wonder who will laugh at me?"

Marie came in, deposited the teapot and made a graceful exit again.

"Everyone will laugh at me," said Lucia very quietly, answering herself. She began to pour the tea.

"Why should they laugh?" asked Anna. "They must be fools."

"Perhaps they are," said Lucia. "But the laughter of fools isn't a thing I can bear very easily. Still all that kind of thing can be staved off a while yet, can't it? Ten years, Anna? Another ten years, of sorts, I give myself."

Anna thought carefully over a reply.

"I've seen women of fifty and fifty-two who looked wonderful," said Lucia quickly. "Perfectly wonderful."

"You won't look at any other side of life, then, Lucia?"

"There is no other side."

"Work," said Anna; "children; love—real love, not only an affair of pearl necklaces."

"Love is all the same. Wait; wait and see."

"It is what I am going to do, Lucia."

Lucia passed the cigarette box.

"Not another for me, Lucia. I am going to sing."

"You are too indomitable, Anna."

Below them the doorbell sounded. Lucia sat forward, listening. Anna saw a faint flush creep into her sister's face. The front door had opened and closed.

"I wonder if anyone came in," said Lucia.

"You said you were not at home."

"I know, I know. Not at home except to—there's always someone to whom one is always at home somehow. It might be——"

Her voice trailed off. Marie entered.

"Mr. Bobby is downstairs, madame."

"Send him up," said Lucia, "in two minutes."

Marie left suavely. Lucia rose quickly.

"I didn't expect him," she said in a light, pleased, embarrassed voice. "I thought he was rehearsing all day. I suppose he's just managed to slip out. He never keeps away from me for long."

She was at the dressing table, powdering her face swiftly. She took a phial of strong Eastern perfume and put a tiny drop of it behind each ear and in the palms of her hands.

"Is he coming up here, Lucia?"

"Why, yes, my dear. I always see my friends anywhere."

She put a touch of red on her lips.

"I shall let you off to your practising, my child, now that I have someone else to bore."

She draped her *peignoir* deftly round her. She had suddenly taken on an evanescent sparkle, a lightness and happiness. Anna rose, put on her coat, snatched her gloves just as the door opened again.

"Mr. Bobby," uttered Marie, like velvet.

Anna heard Lucia cry "Paul!" She just saw a tallish, very slim youth with oiled hair swept back from his sallow, dark face, large dark eyes, and a smile of experienced ingenuousness as she slipped by him and went out. She passed down a softly carpeted stairway, through a dim, warm, flower-scented hall, and yet somehow was glad to leave it all for the cold street.

Her childish envy of Lucia had long passed; her admiration given place to tenderest pity. She who stood at the break of the morning was sorrowful for the sister whose autumn came so early and so frostily.

When she reached home a heavier scent than the odour of last night's roses assailed her. The air was languid with lilies. Again there was a big washbowl on the round table, and the lilies filled it. She ran forward eagerly, in spite of all her cautionary tactics with herself, just to see—but there was no word; not one.

She put the lilies on the top of the piano. She sat down

to the piano presently, with the happy feeling of a woman soft among darling luxuries. The insidious happiness was in her eyes and heart and brain; even in the finger tips. She began to finger delicately the Barcarolle of Hoffmann. Those were the words in which she could best love the roses and the lilies. The song was one suited to her voice, her temperament; even to her transient mood of to-night.

Night of stars and night of love——

The oblivious girl did not know that her weary landlady stood dreaming on the stairs outside to hear the song; nor of the small poor crowd who collected slowly beneath her half-open window and waited there.

V.

King Garnet waited in his car outside the printing works. He had not taken his chauffeur, and he was not using his big touring car. He had taken his mother's little coupé and he was driving it himself. It was inconspicuous and small among the big vans that still at closing time lumbered in and out of the yard; and the bicycles of messengers and the tricycle carriers and the handcarts. He had sent no word to Anna Land; he was just, as he said to himself, chancing it. But there was one thing which with his impish sense of humour he had done. He had invented a pretext by which some third person should keep Silver behind in the office for a few minutes after official closing time. The third person knew nothing of the game; Silver knew nothing; only King Garnet knew and laughed to himself in the darkness of the little coupé.

He was not going to vex Anna Land with any kind of wordy duel with Silver about the business of escorting her. He hoped lazily, and yet with a relish that rather surprised

himself, to catch her in a propitious temper; and he could speak her fair, very fair.

King Garnet knew what was a propitious temper for a working girl; when she was tired at the end of the day; when all the early morning spirits of her sheer youth had been worked off; when the anticipation of a good dinner looked even better than the dinner itself would taste; when she didn't much care. If there could be added to this raw weather, darkness, frost or drizzle; no matter which, so long as it was cold; a touch of fog, so that the usual journey home by omnibus or tramcar would seem wearyingly prolonged—so much the better.

Yet, withal, he was a kind young man; and, so far, all his light-hearted prowlings had not yet made of him a cad or a beast. He hunted girls with the same joyful zest with which he hunted deer or fished for salmon; and he was always tender, and tried to be fair, and struggled—so long as the struggle did not involve any acute form of sacrifice—not to make his already broad code of morals any broader.

"The finest girl—absolutely the finest—I've ever run across," he was thinking to himself of Anna Land. And as the thought formulated—he was watching the big door of exit for the workers—she emerged at the tail of a stream of rapidly dispersing girls.

"Different from any of 'em; so different!" he said to himself, bounding from the car.

There was still a light shining through the wire half-blind of the office window where Silver and an innocent third person held converse.

Garnet intercepted Anna without loss of time.

"Miss Land!"

"Mr. Garnet!"

"Yes, I. Good evening. I was just—that is to say, I have a car here. It's beastly foggy. I hope you'll let me drive you home."

"Thank you; but I take the tramcar along the Embankment."

"The foggiest stretch in London, of course. Please don't be ungracious, Miss Land, but let me drive you home."

"It's kind of you, of course——"

"I already know where you live."

"I know you do," she replied slowly.

The light in Silver's office was suddenly switched out. Garnet glanced swiftly at the dark window, but no more swiftly than did Anna. He knew that she wished to escape Silver to-night. She knew that Garnet knew. It established an ethereal friendliness of conspiracy between them.

"Quick!" he cried, with a shining smile; and it was so much a boy's smile of delighted achievement that when he took her arm she suddenly quickened her steps and ran beside him to the little car waiting on the other side of the yard. They were in the car and out of the yard before Silver emerged from the works, cursing at his delay.

Garnet drove for a short way, and then pulled up beside the curb, took his hands off the wheel and turned to her. Sounds and shapes of traffic were so dim in the fog that it was almost as if they were alone.

"We're all right here for a second or two," he said. "My tail light's an extra good one. I've stopped to tell you something: I'm not taking you straight home."

She looked at him. He had heard in similar circumstances horrified giggles, concealing excitement or incoherent dithers of easily-turned protest; but Anna Land gave neither exhibition. She was tired; she merely looked at him. He looked back quite earnestly; and to his own amazement his look was no criterion of the earnestness he felt. He had an honest anxiety to do right in her eyes—for the evening anyway.

"Listen!" he said. "I do want to talk to you. You think we haven't run through sufficient preliminaries of ordinary acquaintanceship. Well, but how can we ever run through them if we don't start?"

"Why should we ever run through them?" she demanded, but regretfully.

"Because—I want to know you. I want to be friends. Listen! We mustn't stand here by the curb for long, or somebody bigger than we are will come along to bust us up." As he spoke a great car crawled by so near them that their mudguards nearly grated together. "I'm taking you out for some dinner and a talk. You would have refused if I'd asked you. I've abducted you! So far so good. Be kind and make it good all the way," he said very persuasively. "I know you don't want to dine in town, because you would say you hadn't been given time to change your frock." He smiled his smile of habitual tender understanding; and then seeing her quick and correct assimilation of this smile, he erased it with a little guilty dismay in his mind. She knew him!

"So I thought we'd just run down to Richmond," he said. "Will you?"

Anna looked out into the fog.

"Of course you will," he murmured persuasively, watching her.

"It is no use taking me for granted," she said firmly.

"I'm not! I'm not! May we, please, shake hands on the good intention, and shall we go on?"

Anna found her cold and somewhat grubby hand in King Garnet's warm and clean one. She smiled thoughtfully.

"Men are a nuisance," she said.

"I won't be a nuisance. I just long for a talk with you; and, as I say, we must start sometime, somehow, somewhere." He slipped on his furred driving gauntlet again and felt for the gear lever. "Why not like this?"

He started the car.

"Brought off the first bit all right," he thought jubilantly.

But he knew she was tired and that her hands were cold, and he felt protectively and gently towards her. He really wanted to give this poor and charming thing the very best that mere money could buy.

"She's damned proud though," he thought. But he

liked her all the better for it. Somehow her pride exhilarated him like trumpet music or some gallant spectacle.

So they ran on through the curious silence of the fog, rather slowly and cautiously ; but smoothly, comfortably, luxuriously, Anna felt to herself, leaning back against the padded cushion that was more habituated to Mrs. Garnet's scented and furred shoulders than anything like this girl's shabby overcoat. She did not talk, but she thought ; and the thoughts were long, seeking, uncertain. No sooner did they stumble upon convictions than the convictions broke and melted away.

Over the river the fog was whiter and very dense ; but after they left the bridge behind it cleared a little, and King Garnet relaxed his vigilance. He glanced at her.

" Tired ? " He laid a hand momentarily over hers. " Are you cold ? "

" I am not tired," said Anna ; " just—jaded. Give me food and I shall be quite a decent companion. It's a long day, you know," she added.

" At the works ? I know. Nine till six ? What a shame ! " His voice was infused with regrets. " But I must try to make it up to you."

He pressed her hands softly and drove on.

They stopped at the very famous hotel overlooking the hidden river, and passed out of the mist-blanketed gravel drive up the steps and into the redness of the warm glow beyond. Anna went straightway to the dressing-room to look into the mirror. The need for that mirror had been the only sure conviction with her on the way down. She washed her face because it was young enough to stand hot or cold water at any hour of the day. She looked long into the glass and rubbed her lips.

" Try a lip stick, miss," said the attendant confidentially, proffering one.

She tried it, and the effect was what made King Garnet check a brief and joyful smile when he came into the

vestibule again. Austerity had gone—the austerity of her quietness and the pallor which had silenced a lot of things on his lips on the drive down. The red lip stick had given her a buoyant note ; and she had left her overcoat in the cloak-room and pulled her worn frock into shape with the marvellous resource of women with no resources ; and she had given her hat a rake. When she came out of the works it had been just jammed down anyhow, level. Now it poised subtly a little to one side. It was different. She was different. It was a very pleased and anticipatory young man who established her tenderly at their table.

" Cocktail ? " he said. " You positively must. Of course, it's a terrible habit for girls ; but then you haven't the habit, I know. And you must get up an appetite for food somehow."

So when something came, soft as velvet and cold as snow and hot as fire, she drank it. A comfortable barrier rose between her and all the difficulties of the outside world. The orchestra began to play. It was different from Paolo's and Silver.

Anna had been very firm and austere with herself. Always she had feared the weakening. She had kept aloof with a high and faithful resolution from even such few rich things of life as came her way.

" Anna Land," she had always adjured herself, " it will be a great life if you don't weaken."

But while she imposed upon herself this stern strength all the female softnesses in her cried out under it all the while, and urged her towards just the sort of pleasure that she was enjoying to-night.

" Tell me more about yourself," King Garnet was saying.

She answered : " Well, Mr. Garnet, I don't know that I will. It's an insidious vice, thinking about oneself and talking about oneself. It makes the wrong things seem too important."

" What are the wrong things, Miss Land ? "

" Too much self-pity," she answered ; " too much self-

esteem ; too much introspection. I've seen such a lot of girls flattered into thinking they were the most important and attractive things on earth, just by kind men offering a little more sympathy than was good for them."

She smiled at him.

" And just how much sympathy is too much for any woman ? " he demanded. " Tell me that. Tell me if a girl can have too much care and petting. Eh ? "

" She can never have too much for her body," said Anna, suddenly realising this with a sigh. " But, oh, she can easily have too much for the good of her soul ! "

" I believe you were brought up in a stern school, Miss Land."

" Perhaps I was, Mr. Garnet ; my own school. I brought myself up since about the age of ten anyway."

" You've been too harsh a teacher for yourself then. Why not let me take the class for a bit ? I'll teach you. And I should enjoy making lessons of pleasure—the lessons of life."

" The lessons of what you call life."

" Try 'em. I'll guarantee to have you soon writing under my copy heads."

" Don't be too sure of that."

" Try it out then. Let me endeavour, and fail. Let me give you a lesson," he invited.

She shook her head.

After a while, his eyes on her now glowing face and warm eyes and vital body, he asked, " Why were you so annoyed the other day simply because I called you a pretty and amazing girl ? "

" Employer and employé——"

" Oh, but hang that ! There's reason in everything. We're still employer and employé if you like to say so ; but——"

He smiled around and back at her triumphantly.

" Here we are."

" Yes, and I love it," cried Anna.

"And you are a beautiful and amazing girl," he said promptly.

"Some day I'll look into a glass and see if I can allow myself to think so."

"Some day—when?"

"When I'm a success and can afford a little vanity—if one ever can afford it."

She spoke very seriously.

"A woman can always afford herself all the vanity she knows how to enjoy. She is the better for it."

"What kind of a woman are you thinking of?"

"Women like you; beautiful——"

"Don't say it again. And it's just women like me who can't afford anything of the kind. We can't afford to stop and think 'What an interesting soul I am!' We've got to work and get on, or——"

"Don't say get out. A girl as beau——all right, all right. You dear! And I suppose that's wrong too; but I don't care. What I do care about is to convince you that you don't have to get on or get out. You should choose an easier way. Make men your stepping stones."

Anna Land looked at him very squarely across the table. The perfume of the roses between them was in her nostrils; a sparkling French wine had warmed every fibre of her; the cigarette smoke went up like dreams; but her eyes were clear of any such effervescent delights. As she looked at him she saw straight; very straight, indeed. She smiled.

"That doesn't pay."

He knew somehow that she had seen very straight; much too straight for his own temporary happiness.

"Oh," he protested, "what do you mean?"

"I've seen women make stepping stones of men—or they thought they had."

There passed before her in review others besides Lucia; girls who had worked beside her; girls who had worked under or over her; girls who had gone out gayly to rich, reckless marriages or rich, reckless shame—deceiving

themselves with all the strength of their desirous minds. And then afterwards, years or months afterwards, when she had by chance seen one of those girls, she had read in her eyes what her lips desperately refused to utter—the soul's confession, " It doesn't pay."

" Every one of us," she said, " has to return value for what we get ; men and women all alike."

" You are a deep thinker," said Garnet, but at random, for he was looking deep into her eyes and was troubled by the truths he found there.

" I have learned a little," she replied.

" We are being terribly earnest," said Garnet, pushing aside his coffee cup to put his arms on the table and lean over to her. " And I don't want to make you too earnest on our first happy evening together."

" The first and last," said Anna quickly.

" No ! " said Garnet, and for the first time she saw a hint of doggedness in his young face, knitting his straight brows and giving his eyes the directness of swords.

Then she repeated to herself swiftly, " Yes ; the first and last ! Absolutely ! "

" No ! " Garnet asseverated. " There must be another time, and soon. But we can argue that later. I'm longing to ask you more about yourself." He returned to light tenderness. " What do you best like doing ? You dance ? Of course you do ! "

She hesitated, then replied, " Yes ; but——" reluctantly.

" No buts ! You dance. Needless to say, so do I. And you sing. I remember that. I remember also that I am to hear you."

" I don't think I promised that."

The young man smiled, for he knew that here was she most vulnerable. Her darling wish was to be a prima donna, was it ?—the sweet, ambitious thing. He leaned nearer. Very coaxingly : " You mean to promise though. There's no possible reason why you shouldn't. Please ! "

She hesitated again. " You're kind, I think. But if you

mean you'll help me by making your friends give me little engagements out of charity or to oblige you, I'd say no, thank you. I won't be weak. I'm going to succeed on my own merits or not at all."

"What can have made you so implacable?"

"Watching some other women I have known."

"You are not like other women."

Her laughter rang out.

"That's what they were told, and what they believed."

"You're a very disconcerting girl. But I really mean it. Truly, you do seem to me different entirely from any other girl I have ever met. I love your independence, your squareness. But all the same——"

"Say it," said Anna with a smile; "it won't hurt me."

He paused.

"Are you sure you're so aloof?"

"Sure!" she answered securely.

"I was going to say, all the same, let me do something. Let me strew a few roses, open a door or two, shed a little light along the way of Miss Anna Land's road to glory. Don't be too stern with yourself."

"Somebody must be stern with me," said Anna, "and it had better be myself. Oneself one can rely on. Other people—one somehow never knows what they'll do."

"Doesn't one? But now I want to pursue the question further. Suppose you can't quite get there by yourself. What then?"

"Then—I'll stay here."

"Oh, heaven! What a prospect!"

She laughed.

"As you say, what a prospect! No matter. Others face it. All those little girls in the binding room—they've nothing else before them that's certain except that and just any sort of marriage that may or may not come along."

"It might be a happy marriage."

"It might; it mightn't. They'd take it, anyhow; they're so sick of the binding room. Yes, that's all they

have before them; and I'm a good bit stronger than they are."

Again he said, "Ah, but you're different!"

The orchestra had paused to rest; but in the pause, through an open door came the strains of other music and the light shuffling of dancing feet. King Garnet looked round.

"They're dancing, through there. Look!"

She looked.

"Shall we?" asked Garnet eagerly.

They rose and went into the dancing-room. Garnet danced wonderfully well, by much practice. Anna danced wonderfully well by sheer instinct. She followed his steps without a flaw. There was not an instant spoiled by the briefest loss of sympathy. They danced and danced.

They were tucked into the little coupé again and headed Londonward. She leaned back beside him, quiet but exhilarated; restful but all awake. The evening had shone for her, starred with happiness. She was not the tired girl who had come down to the great hotel where the lights still blazed and the dancing feet still moved on and on. It had been ecstatic, the sudden unexpected swoop into another world. The young man beside her had been a fairy prince who had whirled her out of drabness and transplanted her into a land flowing with delights. But now the hour had struck and she was going back; going back——

Anna Land knew that her own life looked to her much poorer, smaller, meaner than it had looked five hours ago. It was gray, unrapturous. The flag was at half-mast. But she was going back and it should be exactly the same. She sighed. King Garnet heard her. She knew that he was sitting there, every sense edged, looking, listening for the next trifling thing she should say or do.

"Take your hat off; lean back," he ordered in a low voice of tenderness.

She pulled off her hat, her sleek hair remaining unruffled,

close set about her head. The hat lay on her lap and she looked down at it ; a shabby hat, soft and limp, of corduroy velvet guaranteed not to spoil in the rain. It had cost several shillings. She knew that her evening's entertainment had cost several pounds. She laughed.

" I'd rather hear you laugh than sigh," said Garnet, smiling. " I thought you were very tired perhaps. But that sounds better."

" I'm not tired at all now."

" Why did you laugh ? " he asked, leaning his shoulder a little down towards hers.

She lazed back in the padded car.

" I laughed—I don't know—at our incongruity. It seemed ridiculous. You've been nice ; I appreciate it, you know ; nice to fetch me from the works just as I am, not to care how I looked. I rather thought there was only about one man in the world—in my world, anyhow—who would do that kind of thing." She was thinking briefly of Silver. Garnet protested : " My dear ! " It passed without rebuke. " My dear ! Don't you know you're a queen in any clothes ? I mean it ! Really ! You are truly very wonderful to me, Anna Land ! "

" I look what I am—a working girl."

" You look what you are ; different from any other girl in the world."

She was supremely happy, lazing back under the fur rug.

" Only about an hour more, at most," she was saying to herself. " I'll enjoy it, every minute."

The fog had lifted a little, was whiter and thinner, but Garnet drove slowly. He was ecstatically troubled. He did not quite understand himself over this girl. He knew that her touch was a thrill ; to dance with her in his arms was to be superlatively content ; to look into her eyes was to see truth and respect it ; to look at her lips was to long to kiss them. In this blind night of mist there was little on the road. He drew the car up on the side.

" That's why you laughed ; but why did you sigh just

before ? I know why." He pulled off his gauntlet and caught her hand under the rug. " To-morrow doesn't look good, does it, Anna ? " he murmured.

" To-morrow will do very well."

" To-night isn't over yet. Anna, do you really mean all you say ? "

" I think I usually mean everything I say. I've usually thought things out pretty carefully, you see, before I speak."

" Yes ; but do you know that already you mean a great deal to me ? "

" Impossible, Mr. Garnet. And, please, can't you realise that I don't want this ? I've loved going out ; being looked after ; flowers, lights, music, dancing ; a good dinner. I love life, sparkling. But I can't have it so. I mustn't. Please understand. Let us drive home."

" Very soon." Then she saw that the young man was deadly serious ; troubled. He switched on the light in the car over their heads. " I want to see how you look, Anna." And she glimpsed the set of his face, the set of his lips, the intentness of his gaze. Then what she had said brought memories.

" Flowers ! I haven't th-thanked you yet for all the flowers you sent me. It was you, wasn't it ? "

" Why ? Could it be anyone else ? " he said intently.

" I didn't think it was anyone else. Thank you for the flowers, Mr. Garnet. Let go my hands and drive on."

" Very soon. But first—let me kiss you."

She shook her head. " No."

" But, Anna, I—love you, dear."

He said it very softly. She looked into his face and saw that, to her amazement—and to her terror, though she did not know that the leap at her heart was terror—he spoke the truth. For the moment he loved her ; or rather, in the moment he had begun to love her. He drew nearer.

She shook her head and implored sharply, " No, don't kiss me !"

"Darling——"

"It's a great life if one doesn't weaken," said Anna to keep herself steadfast and speaking only half audibly. But, his senses all edged, he caught it.

"Weaken?" he repeated caressingly.

"You mustn't kiss me."

"I tell you, dear, I love you."

"Oh, no! You and I cannot love each other."

"Couldn't you love, Anna, a little?"

In Anna Land's heart there was a devastating confession —she could love King Garnet! He was young and ardent. She was young and ardent. They sat close in the privacy of the little car, with the white mist all over them like veils and not a star shining through above them; no footsteps sounding; no traffic; not an eye to see if she leaned against his shoulder and shut her eyes and let that kiss just happen. But afterwards? More kisses——

Anna Land had, as she said, brought herself up in her own hard school. She turned her face away out of temptation.

"You could love me, Anna?" he murmured humbly, kissing the palms of her hands.

"No," she answered; "no."

A very rage to conquer swept through Garnet. He was amazed and thrilled to find himself thus held back, and it seemed to him that never in his life had he wanted anything so much as he wanted the girl beside him. He drew her to him and looked down into her face.

"Listen!" She listened breathlessly. "I do love you, Anna. I do! I've known you a very little time—I don't know you at all—but you are different. You aren't reckoned with as other women are. I love you and I'll never be contented till I get you. And I'd make you very happy. Will you marry me?"

Anna was too breathless to answer till she felt his arms closing in on her, and then she held him off. She recovered.

"No!"

"No!" His amazement and chagrin were so real that at first they could not be hidden. Then he, too, recovered. "Anna, why?"

"You have everything; I—nothing."

"But I want to give you everything."

"You have been very good, very kind, very sweet to me; but you don't understand."

"What is it that I don't understand?"

"I will try to explain to you."

"Quickly, darling, so that I can——"

"You are a rich man. I can't marry a man just because he is rich."

He had been quick to see her moment of weakness a while ago. So now he asked softly and triumphantly, "But couldn't you marry him because you loved him?"

"Not a man like you."

"A man like me!"

Anna Land answered steadily: "A man who was born rich; who has never had an obstacle to overcome; who has never done a day's work in his life; who, if he were penniless to-morrow, could not keep himself alive for a week by the labour of his hands or brain. It isn't good enough."

For quite a while Garnet sat dumfounded. He began replies, and left them unfinished as inadequate. No one had ever presented to him so cruel a view of himself; no one, so far as he knew, had ever taken such a view. As the world went, it was insanity. And yet the thing had been said clearly by a poor girl in his employ, in his power to some extent; it had been explained to him, unglossed, that he, the richest man on her horizon, young, healthy, kind, witty, popular, was not good enough to become her husband. It took his breath away for a few moments. It was not so much that his vanity rose in resentment; he really had in him the sufficient humility of most decent men; and his sense of humour was lively. All the same, no other woman

in his experience had ever in the least prepared him for such a point of view.

And at last he said, quite gently, "Is that really what you think of me, then?"

She nodded, looking down. Had he but known it, she was very near to tears.

"I wonder if I am truly such a dud as that," he mused.

She nodded again.

"You would see if you ever really came up against things good and hard exactly what your own value is. But you'll never come up against things like that. You're King Garnet. Sometimes one has heard of some very rich man making a bet that he will empty his pockets and walk out into the world and keep himself for just so long; and I've heard that once or twice a man has done it. But that was only play, a game. He had everything to come back to any time."

Quite gently and with sufficient humour he said, "So there's no hope for me, eh, Anna?"

"You're all right—for yourself. You satisfy yourself. Let it go at that. You've a lovely life before you; the kind of life you like best."

He mused.

"Yes, it is the kind of life I like best. It's a good old life. I love it. But I want to please you too. Dear——"

"Have I to say it all over again?" she cried.

"No! Don't say it again! Please!" He started the car in a hurry and drove on.

It was about eleven o'clock when they came into London. They sat in silence. Garnet drove her to her door and helped her out of the car.

"Let me come in," he begged, "for a moment—only a moment. There are things I want to say to you."

He himself was hardly clear as to what these things might be; all he knew was the great urge in him not to let her go quite like this; not to let the new intimacy of this evening lapse at once into the formalities of to-morrow.

He held her hand.

"A moment," she said hesitatingly. "Only a moment then. The fire won't be lighted. It—it won't be comfortable."

He laughed and followed her gladly up the narrow stairway of bare dark wood. She laid her hand on her door knob and turned to him, faintly smiling, in the light of the single gas jet that glimmered on the landing.

"It's a horrid place, of course."

She opened the door and they saw the glow of firelight. It danced over the shapes of the meagre furniture and sent red gleams into the shining wood of the piano. The lilies and roses still mingled luscious scents. Sitting in the uneasy armchair on the hearth, head in hands, shoulders hunched, sulky, inscrutable, was Silver.

VI.

Anna entered her beloved privacy quickly. The privacy had been violated. It was an outrage! Unpardonable that Bertie Silver should have come into that room in her absence and kindled her fire and stayed there!

"Why are you here?" she said quickly. "Why?"

Silver rose. His tallish figure looked taller in the shadowy room. His proportions assumed fantastic shape with the dancing flames behind him.

"You were out," he said.

Garnet had followed Anna into the room and closed the door behind them, not recognising his manager. Now at the first sound of that resonant voice he started. He took in the position. Silver had entered; had waited, had lighted that unauthorised fire; was very much at home there. Swiftly male rage surged up in him and flowed through every vein till his very finger tips were suffused

with it. He moved up close behind Anna, assuming instinctively the attitude of one who had the right. Silver straddled on her hearth rug, also in the manner of a man who had a right. As quickly as King Garnet had realised him he realised King Garnet. The girl stood between them.

"Yes," Anna said at last; "but that being so, what made you come in?"

"I waited for you."

"So I see, Mr. Silver. But——"

"Your landlady knows I am a friend of yours and let me up to wait. Your door was not locked."

"I ought to have locked it," said Anna.

"Will you light the gas, Mr. Garnet?" she added, turning to the young man at her shoulder.

He obeyed. The light shot up in the little room, revealing them to each other. Silver looked from Garnet to Anna with the hint of a smile touching his lips. But it was a distorted smile.

"'Evening, Silver," King Garnet nodded after a pause.

"'Evening, Garnet," Silver replied.

It was the first time the gage had ever been thrown down thus between master and man, and all the three in the room knew in their different ways the significance of such an occasion. Garnet knew, not only from the entirely unwonted familiarity of his manager's address but from the boiling tone in which he uttered the words, that the gage had been thrown; but in Anna's presence he could not pick it up. And he was a young man of broad principles and easy mind who, had it not been for that boiling voice, would have merely said to himself: "Oh, well, fellow's a socialist. This is his free time. I don't pay for it. We meet here on equal ground, I suppose."

But Silver had meant more than that, and King Garnet knew it. Anna knew it too. She began to take off her coat and handed it to Silver to dispose of. He took it to a corner of the room and hung it on a hook where he had

hung his own old mackintosh. Garnet looked at Anna, raising an eyebrow.

"What shall I do?" the look asked.

She answered it with one that he interpreted as meaning "Stay." He sat down on the edge of the table. Upon the table lay a great bunch of violets. Silver returned to the hearth.

"Violets," said Anna, taking them up. "How beautiful!"

"Are they?" Silver answered in a tone of concentrated meaning, and his gaze went to the richer masses of flowers already disposed on bookcase and mantelshelf. He turned deliberately and looked at each bowl; then faced round again and looked at Anna.

"If you brought these," said she, indicating the violets, "thank you. They are sweet."

He smiled contemptuously.

"Was there anything you specially wanted to say to me, Mr. Silver?"

"Many things, Miss Land. But it is too late now, I dare say. It is after eleven o'clock—n-n-nearly twelve."

He stuttered in the sheer effort of controlling the dark rages within him.

"Yes, it is late," said Anna. "Mr. Garnet drove me down to Richmond. We dined there and danced a little. It has been delightful. No wonder that it is nearly twelve o'clock before I get in."

Silver's breath went. Garnet, seated on the table edge, looked at him steadily. He itched to take Silver by the scruff of his neck and the seat of his baggy trousers and pitch him down that narrow stairway. He knew, too, that he could do it, easily and joyously, for his body, anyhow, was whipcord and steel. That was never slack, in spite of Anna Land's strictures of him on other counts.

"You've made a beautiful fire," said Anna, kneeling down beside it with a woman's love for red coals, and warming her hands.

Silver looked down upon her.

"I made it for you. I thought you might be cold when you came in—wherever you had been. And I meant to wait until you came and ask you what you had been doing."

After this there was a silence among them, until Garnet broke it by beginning crisply, "Now look here, Silver——"

Every muscle and nerve in Silver's body, every intention and desire in his mind, sprang on the instant into a fighting posture. He kept his hands down; he did not move; and yet that is what he expressed clearly.

"Miss Land is tired," Garnet went on, watching him. "She is thinking of her day's work to-morrow. We had better both get out."

"After you," said Silver.

While Garnet hung there undecided for a moment, itching to his finger tips to get to grips with this adversary, Anna rose to her feet.

"That's what I will decide," said she in a voice before the deadly ice of which Silver relaxed, turning upon her a quick, supplicating look. "And I'll sing one song to you, and then you both will go. Please! That's fixed and nothing alters it."

"If you say so," said Garnet.

Silver hung his head in a curious, sulky, ashamed way he sometimes showed before her, and replied nothing.

She went to her piano, opened it, looking gravely across its top at the two insurgent men. Silver threw himself into the armchair again; and Garnet, meeting her grave eyes, seated himself once more on the table edge. She sang to them the lullaby which she often sang to herself at nights.

There was an armistice. Peace came into the place.

To Garnet that velvet voice of wondrous depth and power was an astounding revelation. He sat awed, perplexed, marvelling. So short a while ago she had seemed to him little more than a toy; a feminine toy, just unusually intricate—and that would be all. He had had no doubts,

in spite of her first austerities, that she would be little different resultantly from other girls. Later, in his arms, as they danced, he began to know that she was more desirable than that. Later still she had refused him and all that he was and had in no uncertain terms. He knew then, respectfully, that here was, if not a soul incorruptible, at least a soul uncorrupted. Now, as she sang, there was revealed to him a woman of strength and glory, a prize. And even so soon he was ashamed of the way he had once valued her.

He watched her keenly, eagerly, worshipingly. And he knew that just as keenly, eagerly, worshipingly, did Silver in his sullen way watch the smooth head rising on the throat of a song bird across the piano-top. Between them there could be little doubt of the issue, surely. But there would be other men, just as desirous, just as eager. He knew hot jealousy.

The song ceased. Silver merely cast down his devouring eyes and stared into the fire without a word; but Garnet got up and went over to the singer.

"Thank you, thank you! You are wonderful! And more than ever now you must let me arrange a concert, introduce you, help you——"

Silver looked up very swiftly, leaning forward, gripping the arms of the chair.

"Do you think you can do it, then?"

He hurled the question from him as if he were getting rid of a bomb that had long been in his hand.

"Why——" Garnet began, frowning.

Anna looked from one to the other. She touched Garnet's hand very lightly—a warning touch. Silver did not see it, to construe it into a caress; but Garnet felt that little feather flick all over him and warmed to it as to a flame. Also it soothed him into obedience.

Silver gazed maliciously. But there was something more than malice in his dark eyes—a secret, a sword, a crashing triumph. He leaned forward, as if arrested only by his

own thoughts from springing from the chair and hurling the secret at them—the real bomb this time ; the killer.

" Well, I really think, you know——" Garnet began easily.

Anna gave his hand another little eluding touch. She rose, closed her piano, stood smiling a tired smile.

" Go, both of you ! At once ! It isn't only that I shall fall asleep in another five minutes, but that I'm a girl living alone. Concerts to men at midnight won't appeal to my landlady's sense of propriety at all."

Garnet was instantly penitent.

" How could I possibly fail to think of that ? "

" You are not used to bothering over such trifles," Anna conceded.

Silver turned to get his hat and mackintosh. He buttoned himself to the chin, looking strangely at Anna.

" There was something I wanted to tell you of," he said ; " but to-morrow will do. Can I see you to-morrow ? Will you dine at Paolo's—to celebrate a dazzling piece of luck ? "

" Luck ? Yours ? "

" Mine ! "

" I am so glad, Mr. Silver. So glad ! " she cried, and indeed she understood so well how dazzling would be the importance of an unexpected piece of luck in a life like Silver's that she was generously and genuinely radiant.

" You'll tell me all about it to-morrow. I'm sorry I wasn't in to-night." For she knew, too, what must be the souring disappointment of not being able instantly to tell of such a piece of luck to the person who matters most.

She forgave Silver his ill temper. She put her hand in his.

" At Paolo's to-morrow, then ? " said Silver, looking at her intently.

" At Paolo's. And I'm honoured to be asked to celebrate it with you."

Silver pressed her hand and turned away. He went out on to the dark landing, where the gas had now been extinguished, and began to grope his way downstairs. He

heard Garnet, almost immediately behind him, groping, too, and then striking a match. By the light of that match the two men found their way out together, not speaking.

They were in the street.

"Can I give you a lift, Silver?" Garnet asked tersely.

"No, thanks, Garnet," Silver replied, not tersely at all, but with a queer gloating quality in his voice. He stood a moment with Garnet beside the car. "A nice little machine, this. You have several, I think. You must find life pretty good. You like your toys, I know. And I am obliged for the offer of a lift, but your way and mine don't lie together, Garnet. They never will now. They never will."

He walked off quite suddenly. Garnet pulled open the door, threw himself into the little coupé, started the engine and yawned: "What's the matter now with that sullen hound? What's he mean? Some day he and I have got to have a grand settling up."

He went home, humming and singing gently to himself bars of the lullaby.

VII.

Anna went home on the stroke of six the next day, not lingering, according to her chosen custom, to see the last of her girls away. Silver had sent round to her at lunch-time a note: "Put on your best glad rags to-night, there's a dear. It's a very great night." So she hurried home.

When she had bathed her face and hands and softly perfumed herself and put on the short black silk frock and the sleek stockings and a red hat, she drew over it all her shoddy coat, and was ready to meet and talk with Silver. Not only her delicately powdered face, her sparkling eyes, the graces of her body were ready, but her mind was ready too. It was informed with a quick, real gladness and

sympathy for Silver's good luck. She was going to say, "I'm glad, glad, glad!" and to feel it too. Her ambitions preoccupied her less than he thought. She was woman enough in her intuitions to feel his moods, his struggle, his quick, sour tempers; she understood.

The landlady came up.

"Mr. Silver's below in a car."

The excited woman had not been able to refrain from flying upstairs herself with such news. Generally she waved Silver up with a dreary "You'll find her in," but to-night she ran in herself, shining with reflected joy in the other woman's coming pleasures. She was only less pleased than if the car had been brought for herself.

"My, you're going to have a good time! A great big closed car, with a chauffeur all correct. My, Miss Land, we're coming on! He's a nice gentleman, Mr. Silver, in spite of his black looks. Some of the blackest looking has the whitest hearts. . . . You've got yourself up nice, I'll say."

"I'll be in early."

"You won't be in early, not with that car. You'll have dinner, then a drive, then supper. I shall leave the latch down."

She went sighing and smiling downstairs behind Anna. And there, on the doorstep, was Silver, strangely unfamiliar in some indefinable way, in the darkness.

"I brought a car for you," he mumbled in a voice throttled with excitement.

They got in. They drove off in silence; then Anna, recovering from her first surprise, asked "But why? Why? You know I enjoy our—our simple evenings, going on a bus to Paolo's and——"

"I told you this is a great night."

"Oh—and you——"

She saw between the open fronts of a new gray overcoat the gleam of his white shirt-front. For the first time in her life she beheld him in dinner dress. He wore a new gray

Homburg—he had not aspired to the full sartorial conventions—tilted to one side.

"I was busy in the lunch hour," he replied laconically, but she knew with the tenderness that a woman feels for an over-strung child that he was in an agony of rapture. "These shops nowadays can fit one out moderately well right off the peg. Do—do you like it?"

"Of course I do!"

"Thought you would. Women do. Women count so much on outward appearances."

"You are wrong," she said gently.

"No, I'm not. . . . Thought I'd let you see to-night that there's more than one man in the world who can bring a motor car to fetch you out."

"Oh, please! You haven't——"

"No, no. That wasn't my sole reason; it was only the best one. I'd have had to go a-bust to-day—or die. I had to!"

He sat looking straight before him.

"I understand so well," said Anna with a sigh, snuggling down under the fur rug, and stroking it with her bare hand; thinking how luxurious it was, and how the rich must roll through life as easily as this powerful car rolled through the streets.

He replied, "No, you do not understand yet; but you will. I have surprises in store for you—surprises," he said very, very softly, "which should alter your life in just as much degree as they have altered mine."

"Oh, what can it be?"

He laughed. There was no bitterness in his laugh to-night, none of the slight tinge of malice against the world which so often coloured it; his laughter was rich—almost coarse—with violent ecstasy.

When Paolo saw the big car draw up at his door, where nothing more impressive than a taxicab or perhaps a humble two-seater ever halted, he came out himself to usher the guests in. And when he saw to his amazement

two of his best-known clients step from the purring limousine he welcomed them with real heartfelt joy in their joy and pride in their happy circumstance. He knew the young hearts of all people and what pleases them.

Anna passed through quickly to leave her old coat in the dressing-room. The coat was a spoil-sport. When Silver had handed his coat—his new coat and new hat—to his usual waiter, who hung them on the stand nearest to their usual table, he stood waiting for Anna. His heart was already so charged that it seemed as if it could contain no more emotions of any kind, and yet more emotions, and more yet, rushed and crowded into it while that minute of waiting droned by. Chiefly he knew a great red exaltation. Red, the colour of danger, of battle and conquest, coloured Paolo's restaurant; red hung in a misty curtain before his eyes. It was like a big dawn coming up over a battle day. And he held the enemy past all doubts; he held him and, hip and thigh, he smote him.

"No," he said to himself, "that is for to-morrow."

Then he saw, coloured through the red curtain of victory, Anna coming delicately towards him. He had often noted and admired her delicate walk, a fastidious and yet sure way she had of stepping; and now he was personally proud. He beheld her more than ever possessively, and when she smiled at him he saw in that smile already the shining surrender that surely now must come.

He was oppressed with unconscionable delight also in himself—in his new dinner clothes; his wonderful shirt of best fineness and purity; the perfect tying of the tie he had for fifteen minutes manipulated before the glass which had so often and so long reflected his ill-dressed image. He had in his waistcoat pocket a gold watch, thin, a wafer, about as big as a half-crown. In his pockets was money.

That morning he had been to his bank and depleted exultantly his meagre savings. All this was to cut a figure to-night for this beautiful girl. The exhibition could not have been postponed; he had to give way to the childish

impulses surging within him. And this was but the preliminary figure cutting.

He ushered Anna into her seat. Paolo was beside them, in a dream of sympathy.

" Your orders have been carried out, sir. The dinner will be to the signorina's taste ; I am certain of that."

He proffered Anna a special little menu on a pretty card—a thought of his own. She realised instantly that this was not the ordinary double sheet with the table d'hôte meal on one leaf and a varied bill of fare on the other.

" What is this, Mr. Silver ? "

" A special dinner for you, Anna. I telephoned."

Paolo beamed.

" Oysters," said he conspiratorially, " consommé, *homard chaud*, spring chicken, and ice. Dessert I bought myself for the signorina. And——"

He snatched the wine list from the hand of the hovering wine waiter. Silver took it, his childish thrills giving place to something more solid ; a dark, queer, secret satisfaction and anticipation.

He cleared his throat and said to Paolo, " Champagne ? "

Paolo took the card, understanding the questioning hesitation. He bowed and beamed.

" Leave it to me, sir. I have a 1911 vintage. You are safe at Paolo's."

He went away.

" This is all very wonderful," mused Anna.

Silver leaned across to her.

" Wonderful ? Yes ! But you haven't heard the wonderful part yet, and it will keep. It's going to keep all dinner-time, getting better with waiting, like wine. You look a darling, a dream. What I want to know is, are you happy ? Are you enjoying yourself ? . . . Wait ! "

He beckoned Paolo and they conferred. Paolo went away again and returned with cocktails. He bowed and beamed.

" Wouldn't you like to be able to do this kind of thing—

and more, much more—just when you wished ? " Silver asked, watching her.

" I would—I shall some day."

" The some day may be nearer than you think, little Anna." A spread finger tip from his left hand reached out and touched hers on the stem of her glass.

" No, no nearer than I think," said Anna.

" Wait ! " he replied. " Wait till all the opportunities you crave are just laid in your lap."

" By someone else ? "

" By——" He paused and laughed. He drained his glass. " I'm not going to tell you yet."

" I am going to earn all my opportunities myself ; I told you so. I'm going up to the top of the hill by myself."

" I'm not going to tell you yet," he repeated, really incapable of heeding her on such a night. " It will improve with keeping, and I've kept my counsel for so long that a couple of hours more or less is easy. There are some men who must blab, must confide, must crow too early. That's not me. I don't think you really know me, little Anna. I've often thought so."

His victorious and vainglorious look at her said, " That's the reason of all your inappreciation, my girl."

" Who knows anybody ? " she replied.

" Claptrap ! " said Silver. " You will know me and I'll know you, so well. We'll be divinely happy—divinely." He added with a laugh, " But everybody won't be divinely happy. No. . . . No."

The champagne was set in a bucket of ice beside them. Oysters arrived.

" Your riddles are beyond me," said Anna a little nervously.

" Of course, of course ; at present. . . . Eat your oysters, my girl."

He ate his oysters rapturously.

" Anna, I want to give you every luxury. It is heaven to me."

"You are, as always, very kind to me," she said slowly.

"Women like you are made for the purpose of receiving kindnesses, Anna; kindnesses meaning worship and burnt offerings and——"

"No, that is not my whole purpose in life. I was not made for that."

"What else should you be made for?"

"To give as well as to receive," she answered.

After a pause he leaned over to her and said huskily, "You would be giving enough for me if——"

She said very gently: "Ah, I think that is where men are wrong. They make mistakes. A woman has never given enough of herself till she has given her all. And after men have received as much as they want there is often so much left. Men want too little. We have more to give than men can yet find use for. If they only knew!"

"Your idealism is beautiful."

"It is not idealism. Every woman knows it in her heart."

"I love your sweet thoughts; always did. But—but you'll grow out of thinking just like that. You will begin to grow this very evening, my dear."

"You seem very sure of something."

"I am sure that no natural woman will resist the opportunities, or the pearls or the pomp or the power or what not that she's been craving for when those opportunities or pearls or what not are just laid in her lap."

"Oh, you do not understand!"

"Very well, my dear; very well. I understand," he said with a smile of dark wisdom. "It is you who do not understand yourself."

"That is something that all men think."

"Where do you glean your wisdom about men?" he asked with an intent look, suddenly concentrated.

"I have gleaned it everywhere I went," she murmured. "But mostly I have gleaned it from observing women."

"I love your sweetness and idealism, Anna, as I've told you. I love it. But it's not going to carry you anywhere."

"I've told you, so often that you must be tired of hearing, where it's going to carry me."

"I know where it's going to land you exactly," he exclaimed, and he looked past her, into some distance peopled by his own imaginings, with a triumphant smile.

Then he cleared away these vaguenesses—so unsatisfactory—with a gesticulatory sweep of the hand.

"But let's not talk of little idle things like that. They also will keep—for some quiet evening when you and I sit together with our feet on the same fender, before a log fire, and you have nothing else to do but dream these small dreams of yours, and I want nothing better than to listen."

"Let's not talk like that either, Mr. Silver. It worries me. You press me all the time. You—you mustn't. You must forget."

"I'm passing on to more mundane things immediately, Anna; and it's the mundane things a woman wants really, for all she loves to sit and idle away an hour or two enjoying her little thoughts. Dear little thoughts of women that never come to any real fruition, Anna. They make you very sweet, all those ideas. A man wouldn't have you be without them; but—well, it's more solid things that turn the scale. Tell me, dear girl, wouldn't you like a fur coat?"

Anna's eyes glowed; but she answered after a minute: "I don't care really terribly about it. I wouldn't sell a single one of my sweet little ideals, as you call them, for the finest fur coat in London, Paris or New York."

"Aha! But if you had a fur coat here, could touch it and see it—— Tell me anyway, Anna, what kind of a fur coat would you choose if the fairies came and offered you one? The fairies, not Bertie Silver—I see what you're thinking."

"I won't talk about fur coats," said she resolutely.

He refilled her glass. The champagne foamed persuasively. She drank and sighed. Her cheeks were flushed happily, but her eyes were very serious.

"A fur coat is just a symbol of all I mean," he explained

with a sweep of the hand. "There are so many other things."

"You don't need to tell me," she sighed, but quite cheerfully.

Still, her thoughts flew momentarily to her sister. Silver had sent them there. She saw Lucia in her cream-and-rose bedroom; the fire, the tea table; the silk curtains at the windows, frail as they were, drawn against the cold, dusky afternoon and powerful to shut it out; all the impalpable, perishable things of wealth—things to be destroyed at a breath, yet had the power of shutting out big ugly things like dirt, disease, cold, darkness, struggle, want. Lucia, behind her rose curtains, in her fragile chiffons, was armed and walled, useless as she looked and was, against wolves with whom Anna and her kind fought alway—was with not the permanent certainty of frightening those wolves off either. Money did it; the alimonies, the settlements, the legacies—in whatever form the frail and idle Lucia had wonderfully wrested it—from three rich husbands.

Then she remembered Paul Bobby, the dark, suave boy on Lucia's threshold; and dimly she knew that the preyer had become the prey.

It was difficult for women. But more than ever, as she sat that evening in Paolo's restaurant, all her thoughts and wonderments multiplied by the champagne like one reflection seen in many mirrors, she knew that she would hold her course.

She looked back at Silver, returning his ardent gaze clearly and steadfastly in the way that always disheartened and disconcerted him, though he was neither disheartened nor disconcerted by it to-night.

She said, "You know that I have chosen. Oh, you know!"

Silver replied merely and indulgently, "You incorrigible darling!"

At last the meal was over. It had been drawn out till now the other diners were thinning, the noise of talk had

passed away; only one or two waiters besides the ever-serene Paolo remained on duty. The biggest and most purple grapes Anna had ever seen were placed on their table, cheek by cheek with the bloomiest peaches. Paolo murmured a word to Silver, disappeared and reappeared with a black bottle realistically cobwebbed. He drew the cork without a vibration.

"The finest port in London to-day," he murmured, gloating as he poured.

"Well?" said Silver slowly.

VIII.

She knew that the time of revelation had come. This was the hour for which he waited. He would cap the feast with the wonderful story of its wherefore and why. She prepared herself to listen with an ardent glow of interest, of eager curiosity.

"It's an exciting world," she remarked preliminarily as she leaned, receptive, over the table towards him; and he laughed.

"You may say so soon."

He sipped his port and set down his glass. He interlocked his fingers and looked down at them. A smile twisted his mouth and left it preternaturally grave. But it was the gravity of some inner pomp and pride that filled him almost unbearably.

"You see a difference in me, Anna."

She was looking curiously.

"Yes. Oh, yes!"

"What do you see, I wonder."

"You feel extraordinarily free to-night, careless, big; as if nothing mattered to you."

"You see plainly, dear. . . . No, let me talk to you how I like. This is my great night."

"Is it your birthday?"

"My birthday! I've often cursed my birthday. No; it's better than a birthday, little Anna. You say I seem as if nothing mattered to me. Well, it doesn't—not the little things, that is; not keeping my job or managing the works or saving money or wanting to spend it. Yes, I feel big to-night. And I am free!"

"All this time you're telling me nothing."

He leaned over. Their absorbed faces were near each other.

"Anna, I am a very rich man."

"How wonderful! How thrilling! How glad I am!"

"Aha!"

"But you're going to tell me more?"

"Of course! What else are we here for, toasting ourselves in champagne? I have been investigating my circumstances for a long while. When I start nosing a thing out I nose it out very thoroughly. I'm a thorough man. I got into old trails and went back along them till I'd reached what I was looking for."

"Mysterious!" she breathed impatiently.

"I found out what I wanted to find out; that I am not who I am supposed to be. My name is not Silver. I found out that I have a great inheritance. I've been cheated of it for years, but I've got it now."

"Your name is not Silver?"

"It is Garnet."

She caught her breath.

"Gar——"

"You may stare. And I own the Garnet Printing Works!"

"Mr. Silver——"

"Garnet, please. I own the Garnet house, cars, furniture, plate, linen; they haven't a darned stick!"

He smiled.

"How?"

Silver put his clenched fists with a soft thud on the table.

"Like this: I was brought up to believe myself an illegitimate child. My mother died early. I never knew what money she'd lived on. I was just a kid; took it for granted; we weren't rich anyway. She died. Someone came along and provided for me and educated me. I was just a kid; asked nothing; never said why. And when I was sixteen I saw old Garnet for the first time that I could remember, and he told me he had a job for me at the works. I took it, and I've kept it. All I understood was that he was a friend of my mother's and had promised her to look after me.

"That was a good enough tale for me when I was young and innocent.

"A month or two after my mother's death he married his second wife. Well, she was his first as far as the world knew.

"And they had a son and called him King! King of a fine kingdom he is! I laugh——"

"Don't! . . . Wait!"

"I've staggered you fairly. But listen to some more. I remember my mother. She was a most respectable woman—just sweet, Anna. Not the kind of woman to—to—carry on illicit love affairs. And I always had a feeling that her wedding ring was real. Finding out that it was has cost me most of what I had. Finding out that my mother's wedding ring was real has kept me living in a dingy hole with nothing to spend on a good time like other single fellows. But—I've done **it**! They were married in a little church in a little Cumberland village where nobody knew them, and they never lived together openly at all. But when I was coming he made a will in my favour. All for me!"

"Did they love each other?" murmured Anna, her imagination aflame.

"I bet he loved her all right once! He didn't pass on

any of the love to me. . . . But the big point about it all is, Anna, that he died without a new will. Actually! Some of these big, hard men feel so secure. Meant to make one, I dare say—but listen! My mother had a brother, a scallywag sort of fellow, but he knew a bit of law. He knew marriage revokes all wills and testaments; he knew that will of old Garnet's was waste paper when he married again. My uncle had that will re-dated, re-witnessed—whatever these lawyers have to do in a case of that sort was done. I was no lawyer. . . . All I know is the thing's valid! He did not die intestate. My uncle, Anna, he held the threat of a big scandal over old Garnet's head if he played up any tricks. And old Garnet—damned humbugging, cold Puritan he was, save for the one imprudence of his early marriage, Anna—he caved in. Yes! By God! He did! And then—listen, my girl!—when he heard of my uncle's death—months after it had happened—I suppose he set about making a new will, thinking he owned all eternity to do it in. *But he died without doing it!* His lawyers say that a draft was already drawn up waiting for him to sign; but it was never signed. He was killed in a motor accident, as you know. And—I—have—all—the—money!" His voice rose, and yet was faint. "I've had it for nearly twelve years and haven't known it."

Her imagination, all aflame, was not occupied with Silver at all. It had rushed strangely, surprising herself, to Garnet. She could see the straight and careless eyes, the big frame of an athletic boy that was yet as hard as a man's frame; she could hear his laugh.

She cried, "Has he been told?"

"He soon will be. Very soon! He's been spending my money for nearly twelve years, he and that useless hag of a mother of his, while I and my mother took whatever was thrown to us. Yes, I'll break the news, and I'll break it to-night!"

"To-night?"

He nodded. "I will! My lawyers have the whole thing in hand, but I take a personal interest in enlightening King Garnet myself."

"Do you mean he has nothing?"

"His wearing apparel. He's got a good wardrobe."

"His mother, too——"

"She has a good wardrobe also. Oh, they've not stinted themselves!"

"And everything else——"

"——is mine. Get it into your head."

She exclaimed, "What will they do?"

Silver said dryly, "He wouldn't be the first healthy, strong young fellow who's had to work for his mother."

"Work—yes."

"Work—like you and I have worked."

Anna could hear herself saying to King Garnet while his hurt, eager eyes looked into hers, "If you were penniless to-morrow you could not keep yourself alive for a week by the labour of your hands or brain."

She believed this. Tragically she guessed it true. But she surprised herself by crying in a ringing voice, "Well, he will work! Of course he'll work!"

"There is no alternative, I fear," replied Silver in a sleek voice worse than anger; and he looked down at his balled fists lying on the white table-cloth and smiled. "Congratulate me," he said, glancing up at her.

"I do con——" she began, and the words stuck in her throat.

His eyes fastened on her. He saw the new white agitation in her face, and that her fearless eyes held fear now.

"What is the matter?" he said.

And suddenly she knew that she was afraid for Garnet; afraid to see him put into the ring; afraid of the performance he was going to put up. He had the weight and the strength and the punch, but had he the heart? She quivered to his need and womanishly wanted to cover up in some good disguise the probabilities of his speedy and

shameful defeat. She wanted to utter a glib defence, true or false, of King Garnet, of all that he was and was not. She tried to deal sternly with herself, while her breath forsook her, her lips felt dry and her heart beat fast.

"Come!" said Silver incredulously and angrily. "You're not sorry for him?"

"No," she said after a pause; "no, I'm not. Only——"

"Come! You don't tell me that useless damn fool has had any effect upon you, Anna? You with your clear brain? You don't tell me that? If you do, let me tell you something, and it is this: Remember I am Garnet now! I stand in his shoes, take his place! He passes right .out!"

"I'm beginning to understand it."

"I have the money—everything—now. It is I who can give a woman what she wants, not Garnet. When I think how, only a week ago I was raving mad with jealousy of him! And now I don't fear him any more. He—passes—right—out!"

"It will be a big blow for him, this."

"Has he not the capacity to take blows the same as other people? Is he so tender?" After waiting for her reply, which did not come, he went on: "He is! He is tender! You know it! He'll crumple! Lily-handed fool! Well, let him learn. Let him learn a trade and use it, in the painful ways better men than he have learned before him."

"Listen! You're vindictive!"

"I am not vindictive. I am dead fair."

After a pause, she asked, "What'll you do with the money?"

He stared.

"Do with it? Girl, what do men do with money? Make it, spend it——"

"Yes, but your views. You are a good socialist. You think——"

Silver was hit right in the mouth for a moment by this

simplicity. Then he laughed and shifted in his chair, and growled : " I can go on upholding my views better than ever, can't I ? I'll have a good position to speak from now. I shall stand for Parliament, perhaps, on the side of labour. I can do a great deal, let me tell you."

" Yes, but will you share your money ? "

" Yours is the short-sighted woman's view, Anna."

" It was your view a very little while ago."

Silver beckoned to Paolo, who still lingered on such a night.

" There are ways and ways of exploiting that view in its sincerest form," he began.

" Only the rich way and the poor way," said Anna. " One having, the other wanting. I expect you've changed over."

" Things aren't so elementary as all that, girl."

" They were a week ago."

" I'll have my bill, Paolo," said Silver, and he paid it, tipping lavishly. And he added, " You have the rough texts of socialism only ; just the rough texts."

She smiled at him, and shook her head slightly and reproachfully. He was dazzled by the soft haze of her eyes, thinking the luminous melting was for him ; but in reality it came from the abstraction into which his words had briefly sent her. She had a way which she found hard to correct, of falling into deep thought over some sudden revelation made by some person. Now she was asking herself, like Pilate, " What is truth ? " She added, as her own question, " What is socialism ? " And all her resolves to seek truth and find it were hardened. Was Silver already forsaking his gods ? Were the gods of great vehemence, like his gods, so easily flung down, so swiftly dethroned ? More than ever she would cling to the image she had set up.

" It has been an extraordinary evening," she said, and shook herself out of these abstractions to look at him shiningly, radiant with her interest in life.

" A beautiful evening, Anna ? "

"A delightful evening. I've adored it. A thousand thanks."

"It's not over yet."

"But——"

"The car——"

"But——"

"Say this evening has meant as much to you as it has to me, dear girl."

"I think it has," she answered kindly. But she knew its meanings had been very different. They walked down two roads, and he tried to convince her that they walked in one.

She went to the dressing-room, slipped on her coat and came delicately, dreamily out again to Silver. They entered the car. He gave an order.

"What was that you said?" she asked as they moved away.

"I've told the chauffeur to drive out somewhere—anywhere—so that we can talk. We could have gone back to your place and talked there, I knew, if you would have permitted it; but—but, d'you understand, I want to feel rich all this evening, every minute of it? This car's the richest room I have yet, and such as it is I ask you to it. I offer it to you."

"We shan't go very far, shall we?"

"Why not?"

"Working day to-morrow."

"That is all over, Anna, if you will. Any moment you will."

He spoke with both ecstasy and grandiloquence. He loved her, and was conscious of the tremendous values he offered. As soon as they ran into the park—for they were crossing it to leave London—he took her forcibly in his arms. There was no light in the car. He had switched it off.

"Kiss me, my dear, and just be glad."

"Things are not altered between us," she said steadily, refusing him.

For a long time Silver could not believe. At first he argued softly, then more passionately. He grew angry and jealous. His mind leaped on King Garnet and he taxed her with him.

"You've got a crazy fascination for that prize dud," he cried. "I do believe it!"

She scorned this in silence. He pressed her pitilessly for further reasons; she gave him her old reasons, her true ones.

If he would but believe!

"No man would believe," he said, feeling half-strangled by mortification and frustration.

"No man would believe that a girl could be so mad. Mad, Anna! You're stark mad! I worship you and I offer you all I have—and now that's not exactly inconsiderable. No, by Jove! It's not! I offer you the career you're panting for. I'll give you even that, though—though I'm like most men. I want you all for myself. But you shall have your career. I swear it!"

And he pressed her; he begged; he made love to her; he sulked; he bullied; he despaired; he bribed. She was weary when at last he desisted. But he told her that such desisting was only temporary.

"When I was a poor man I got what I wanted. I wouldn't be knocked down. Now I'm a rich man, d'you think anything's going to stop me?"

And she answered urgently, "If you would only listen! I am as I am. No price in the world would buy me."

"Ah, but if you wanted to go!"

"I'll wait for that. I have an idea it's worth the waiting."

She said it softly. The belief stirred her as ever. It was a great faith.

"Don't speak like that!" he cried out. "You make me imagine—you torture me." Furiously he remained disbelieving. "I cannot fail," he said half aloud. "I will not fail. You don't know what you're up against, Anna. The whole world, that's what you're up against. Won't you believe me?"

"I believe myself," said Anna.

"You're not one kind of fool; you're a thousand kinds of fool."

She said steadily: "As for believing you, I've found so far that oneself is the only person one can believe, and that not always. Lean on oneself, live up to one's own standards—they'll usually be higher than other people's standards for one—owe nothing to anyone; stand incorrupt. It's a great life if you don't weaken."

"Ah," he whispered, "but the time of weakness comes."

"Must it, I wonder?"

"It surely will."

"I'll wait for it."

"So'll I."

And at last they reached home again, her home, where he left her. It was not even then eleven o'clock. As he bade her good-night he said, "And now I have someone else to deal with; someone I shan't deal with so lovingly as I've dealt with you, dear."

She remained arrested on the threshold by his voice. All malice and the end of a long patience were in it. He turned and jumped into the car, and she heard him call the order through the window—the address of the Garnet's house.

IX.

As Silver drove in that easy-springed, easy-rolling car through the streets he recovered somewhat from his desperate defeat at the hands of the girl he wanted so crazily that the moon and stars out of heaven itself paled beside her. He had been surprised very bitterly; he had never seriously believed in her dreams and protestations. He knew that she believed in them, but he did not. He

had thought that other dreams could be superimposed easily; that a new and softer creed would evolve automatically at his bidding from the ruin—which ruin would be accomplished also at his bidding—of the old one. He could not have visioned such a wild impossibility as that she should, as she phrased it, stand incorrupt. He had taken all her sweet talk—so he had thought it—for the talk of a woman who had yet to learn real temptation and bird-in-the-hand opportunity. When, for the first time, she should get all that she wanted—not just all a man wished to give on his own account, but all that she wanted on hers—offered up to her, then she would step down.

But she stood incorrupt. Only, Silver did not quite believe it. As he drove on, reconstructing the battle in the car, he began to assure himself that she had been shaken. She would lie down that night, thinking; she would rise up in the morning, thinking; she would go to her dull work, thinking; come home in the evening—his gifts would await her. His gifts only, now! Perhaps King Garnet's credit at the best florists in town would be found to have dwindled. Silver's flowers, Silver's thoughtful ardours would surround her. She had surely been shaken. Soon she would be beaten. She was just a little more inaccessible than other women; and so, more darling.

Silver passed on, exalting his heart again, to his next battle ground. This would be a bloody one. There would be no mercy. Only blow upon blow on an enemy whose most potent weapon had now been struck from his hand. The enemy's own weapon had been sharpened and was turned against him. His very own!

Silver had his lawyers primed; he had next morning's papers primed. But no trickle of the news had got through to Garnet. Silver desired that sweet mission for himself.

Garnet might easily have been out. He usually was out. But this evening, by a pure accident, he was in. He had been playing squash rackets all the afternoon, had dined and seen the only worth-while contest in a boxing show at

the Albert Hall and come home. He was talking with his mother in the golden drawing-room when Silver arrived.

Silver had some small colloquy with the gifted butler, who doubted him.

"Can I see Mr. Garnet?"

"At this time of night, sir?"

The caller obviously was not one of King Garnet's friends. The butler, who had a royal gift for faces, could not recall him.

"It is on important business."

"Have you a card, sir?"

Silver had never had cards, save his business ones. Those he was not carrying.

"No. The business, however, is really important. What is Mr. Garnet doing?"

"He is with Mrs. Garnet, sir."

"My business is with her, too; so take me to them both," said Silver. But that he would not achieve this object without explanation was plain; so reluctantly he added the item which now seemed so far beneath his new raw dignity, "I am Mr. Garnet's manager, and my name is Silver."

The butler let him into the hall and suggested a wait in the library; but somehow Silver got over this idea, and the Garnets being alone he was allowed into the great gold room, where mother and son sat together.

Silver's breath caught, not at admiration of the really wonderful room but at the inner knowledge that it was his. But he exercised sullen control over his breathing powers and they obeyed him again. He came forward steadily through the long high room, which was narrow in proportion to its length and height, and so looked rather like a soft, shining, glowing corridor, with long mirrors and brocade panels streaking the walls sparsely on either side of him, and a wicked profusion of flowers everywhere. The couches and chairs were low and soft, lavishly pillowed. A grand piano far away made a dead break of ebony against

the delicacies of colour ; and two spoiled little Pomeranian dogs yapped at the entering stranger. Silver could have butchered both tiny brutes with savage joy. They, too, would come under the heel of his revenge.

Mrs. Garnet, limp and lazy in her gold-tissue frock, lay back in a chair close beside the fire. King Garnet, just as limp and lazy, lounged near her. The smoke of their cigarettes was on the air. They had been talking when the door opened to admit Silver, but they stopped and looked towards him.

The butler said, " Mr. Silver madam, on important business." He said it apologetically, excusing himself for Silver's unsuitable presence, and the door closed.

King Garnet got up. He advanced, a hand outstretched; but he could not help his eyes uncertainly stretching wide at the sight of his manager in conventional dinner clothes, patent boots, perfect linen—at least, nothing was perfect, of course, by the standard of one of the best-tailored young men in town ; but still——

That look, enduring only for a moment as it did, was seen and registered against him.

" Why, Silver ! " said King Garnet. " This is a—a—great surprise ! " He shook hands, but Silver's slow hand was cold in his.

' Will you sit down ? " said Garnet, indicating a chair than which no feather bed could have been downier.

Nothing wrong, I hope," added Mrs. Garnet, nodding. And then, after the nod, she thought better of it and extended two thin fingers. But these fingers Silver did not appear to see.

" There's nothing wrong from my point of view, Mrs. Garnet," he responded with a watchful smile.

King Garnet looked at Silver, narrowing his eyes a little. The disappearance of the familiar " sir " and " madam " boded something to him. He felt instinctively that this was more than the throwing over of superfluous social respects and differences.

Silver had changed in some radical fashion and now flaunted himself to some inexplicable end. And he recalled that Silver's manner of yesterday had been the same as his manner of to-night.

"It's very late to trouble my mother," he said somewhat abruptly. "Come along into the library and we'll have a whiskey and soda there and you can say whatever you have come to say."

Silver's watchful smile continued, heightened; mirth came into it.

Mrs. Garnet had pulled herself upright and sat looking up at the two men. In a flurry she said, "It's not too late for me. I'm so—interested in the business, Mr. Silver. Let us all talk here, King. Mr. Silver will sit down?"

She suddenly apprehended—but in a dim way—that all her reluctant suspicions were to be dragged protestingly into the light of day; but she was unprepared for more. She smiled winningly.

Silver relished her smile exceedingly. He laid his hand on the back of an easy-chair, watched with incredulity by King Garnet. But King's incredulity had still more than a tinge of amusement in it.

"Thanks," said Silver. He sat between them. King Garnet offered cigarettes. Silver took one meditatively and lighted it. His gaze wandered triumphantly round the room, his great gold room.

"Well, Silver?" said Garnet in a voice of bored but good-humoured impatience.

Silver looked coldly over Mrs. Garnet from top to toe, and his look gave her an inward shiver that she could recall for many a day after. Then he turned towards Garnet.

"Well, Garnet," he replied, and paused on the words to let them sink in, not oblivious of Mrs. Garnet's start of surprise, though he was half-turned from her. "Well, Garnet, I have come here to tell you something that I believe is news to you, though whether it will be quite as new to this lady I cannot say." Mrs. Garnet sat forward,

trembling, and opened her mouth to speak, but did not speak. "Have you any idea of our relationship?"

"Relationship?" Garnet echoed, at ease in the depths of his own chair.

Silver sprawled, a smile on his face. His very attitude was an insult—though to do him justice it was instinctive rather than considered—to a lady of mature years and almost a stranger, in her own drawing-room; and quite suddenly young Garnet's blood, never exactly cool, rose in temperature some few degrees.

"Relationship," Silver nodded, confirmatory. "I go straight to my point. Why not? There has been much time wasted already as far as I'm concerned. In that waste of time I'm the sufferer. I'm nearly thirty now. So I come right to the point and ask you, do you know what we are?"

King Garnet rose and stood on his hearth, with some instinct, as unforced as the instincts that were now governing Silver, of protecting that hearth from he knew not what. He heard his mother give a little protesting moan, and turned towards her. But she had schooled her face. She was wearing her cold society face now, a mask desperately satirical.

From her he looked to Silver again. The meeting of their eyes was the clashing of two swords, and each knew that the combat was mortal. But only one of them knew that the issues were decided.

"Look here!" said Garnet. "What's all this? There's been something in the wind for days now. I've felt it——"

"If you said for months and years you'd be nearer the mark, Garnet."

"I've only noticed——"

"I know all you've noticed. But now I have come here to ask you a question, Garnet. I've asked it, and ask again. Do you know our relationship to each other?"

"Thank God we have none!" replied Garnet contemptuously.

"We have."

"What is it?"

"We are brothers."

There was no sound in the stillness, during which Silver, from his sprawling attitude, looked up intently at his adversary, till Garnet said, "You are a liar!"

Silver leaped up.

"Come into the library," said Garnet, stepping before his mother; but she reached out and caught his hand.

"Kindly speak here, Mr. Silver."

"It is where I am going to speak, Mrs. Garnet."

"What the hell do you mean, Silver, by replying to my mother like that?"

"I reply as I wish in my own house, Garnet."

"Oh!" breathed Mrs. Garnet. And both heard her whisper to herself, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"Mother——" said King.

"Let me speak, Garnet," said Silver. "I am the man here with something to say, and now I'm going to tell you. I'm going to tell you that your father was married to my mother years before he met yours."

"You damned hound, you mean to insinuate——"

Still Silver smiled out of a triumphant face, gray with emotions.

"I insinuate nothing. My mother died before yours married your father—married our father, I should say, Brother King. But I was alive—product of a hopeless mésalliance, perhaps, yes—but there I was. And there'd been a will made in my favour. My mother's price for keeping silence about her marriage with our father was that he should make a will——" Silver paused. "He hadn't wanted to marry her," he said in a dryer voice. "But when I was coming she made him. Marriage, no scandal. No marriage, hell of a scandal. And he loved her; tremendous passion he had for her in a way—his putrid way. Passion—I wonder if you ever inspired such?" he added, turning and looking down on Mrs. Garnet.

Once more he examined her, as it were, from top to toe. There was no sound in the room till Silver took up his tale again.

"Fate was against you, Brother King. Our father meant to make a second will, there's no doubt of that. But my mother was dead; no one seemed to know anything. I knew nothing—a poor, raw lump of a boy, I knew nothing. I thanked him for my place. Aha, thanked him!"

Mrs. Garnet was saying half to herself, "I always felt—I knew—a woman does—but he was a difficult man—one couldn't question him."

Silver looked down upon her. "No; one didn't question him, Mrs. Garnet. Aha! I comprehend that. One kept him in a good temper—reward of pearls. One questioned him on what one suspected; saw justice done—no pearls. I apprehend you, lady. En-tirely."

"Quit that!" said Garnet, his breath coming fast.

"You stand on my hearth," said Silver; "you take what I say. You're guests. You can leave any time. My car is at your service." He paused and saw them literally swallow this, digest it, begin faintly to understand him. "However," he went on, "about a second will. One was made, signed, they say, and incredibly lost. Fate was against you, Brother King, because wills don't get lost. Perhaps it was never made. Do you know?" He looked down once more on Mrs. Garnet.

She shook her head. The mask had gone and her face was defenceless. It registered every blow, like putty. She looked old.

"Anyway," said Silver, "when a draft was made out—either the first draft of a second will or a copy of that which may have been lost or destroyed—and he was on his way to sign it at his lawyers he was killed in a motor accident. Yes, fate's against you, brother."

By a terrible effort King Garnet was holding himself in.

"Now, having told your cock-and-bull story——"

"The story is in the hands of Moss & Parkinson," said

Silver; "proved by them up to the hilt. They wrote to-day to your lawyers. We have every tittle of proof that any law court could possibly need. There is no doubt." He paused to see if they had any doubts; but he knew in his soul that they had none. Fight they might, but——

"I think Moss & Parkinson's reputation stands as high as any firm's. I wished to go to the right solicitors—the very best."

"Now, having told your cock-and-bull story," King Garnet repeated, "get out!"

"This is where I smile," said Silver.

"Oh, you smile here, do you?" said Garnet in a blur of rage.

"King!" his mother whispered.

"Get out!" said Garnet.

"I need not get out," said Silver. "This house is mine; furniture is mine; the cars are mine. Every damn stick in the place is mine! You haven't a penny. Look at it fair and square! Not a penny has either of you got"—he paused again—"unless I give it to you. Well—well——"

Silver struggled with his voice.

"I had a mother. She went poor compared with all this. You have a mother. She has gone rich compared with my mother. The wheel goes round. Some people in my place might say, 'Take your turns.' But I—I may make a lady an allowance——"

"You insult me!" cried Mrs. Garnet, and then she stopped. . . . One must have money. One must? If all this were entirely true she must have provision.

"As for you, brother," Silver said in a reflective voice, deadly in its calculated suavity, "I may be able to offer you something—not that you're any good at anything—but something which would give you a chance to work up to the exalted position I have till now held by your kind favours."

And he stopped, giddy with pleasure, and touched his

lips with his tongue to whet them for more. He found himself suddenly whirled round, taken by the scruff of his neck.

"King!" cried Mrs. Garnet in a helpless, imploring voice as she rose.

Silver found himself rushed through the gold room. The mirrors ran by—flashes of lightning. He was rushed through the hall, where the butler unquestioningly flung open the front door. He was picked up bodily and thrown down the steps into the cold street, the muddy paved street.

"You go to hell!" said King Garnet behind him, and the front door closed.

The driver of Silver's limousine saw all this with enjoying eyes.

The front door opened a moment after to let out the butler, coldly bearing hat and coat. Silver snatched them and flung them into the car. His mind was now fairly chaotic, his body burned, his soul was a cauldron of hates.

The butler went back, and Silver called after him, "I'll damn well pitch you out to-morrow, you fat swine, you!" But the rich, secure front door closed obliviously.

Behind that door, and behind another door, King Garnet had his weeping mother in his arms.

"It's true! It's true!" she was wailing.

"Mother, do you really think——"

"I know! I know! It's worse than I thought; but I always knew! Oh, King! Oh, darling, what shall we do?"

"If it's true we'll worry along. I'll get a job——"

She wailed, "A job! Oh, darling, yes—but what can you do?"

After she had gone to bed King Garnet still sat there, and he asked himself, "Yes; what in hell could I really do?"

X.

Anna Land went to her work with extraordinary turmoil below her quiet surface the next morning. There was extraordinary turmoil in the works too—seething, suppressed. Furious female lamentation ran in an undercurrent through the binding-room. The men were more noncommittal. But nobody except Silver's next assistant was happy.

Silver did not come till late that morning. His next assistant, telephoned on the matter and scenting promotion, was on his job, sickeningly alert, expectant.

The papers had been full of the story. They were fully primed, with details past and present, legal and biographical. Anna knew Silver's hand in all that. He had planned, with his love of the spectacular, a public sensation; and the newspapers, nothing loath, had flung themselves in with him, paper and ink, body and brains. There was even a portrait of him already. His brooding face, blurredly limned, looked out at Anna, she thought, very triumphantly.

Then, about eleven o'clock, Silver came in a taxi-cab. He did not repeat the limousine of the night before, but that was because he was in a hurry. The clamours of all the business about him already were louder than even he had foreseen and prepared for. Lawyers, friends, enemies, reporters, tradesmen, photographers—all were thus early besieging him. But he could not resist that rush down to the works, sandwiched between a visit to his bank and a visit to Moss & Parkinson. Entering he received humble salutations from the doorkeeper and the timekeeper, both of whom had always privately disliked him: both of whom knew that he knew it, and were privately afraid. He wore a new gray lounge suit, and the gray overcoat and Homburg hat of the night before. He went to speak to his deputy.

"Got the news, I suppose, Morrison?"

"Got the news, Mr. Silver. I should say so! Great. They're all stunned here; mustn't take any notice of 'em, Mr. Silver; haven't got their breath back yet. May I tender my congratulations?"

"Thanks, I'm sure," said Silver, literally chewing the end of a cigar.

"We shall have a boss now who really understands the business. It'll be a privilege to work under you, I can assure you, Mr. Silver."

"My name's Garnet now, of course."

"Why—I apologise. 'Course! It had never struck me. We're all of a heap here, you see, sir. Mr. Garnet, of course, it is. Funny how you miss a point like that."

"I'm going to keep Silver, too—Bertie Silver Garnet."

He ached to talk; he ached. He had never so ached before. And he had none but paid listeners. It was hard.

"Fine name, sir. Yes; 'course, they're all wondering here how the—the other Garnets, if I may so put it, are taking the news."

"Bad," said Silver, and a vein throbbed in his throat and the blood seemed to fill his head. "They're taking it pretty bad—hard. Well, the wheel turns. I shall do something for the old lady."

"Old lady, Mr. Sil—Garnet?"

"King's mother."

"Oh, ah, yes, sir. Ha-ha! 'Course! I didn't recognise her from your description. One don't look on her as an old lady somehow. Handsome woman; fashionable woman like that."

"She looked pretty old last night."

"Last night, sir?"

"When I talked it all out with 'em."

"She would! My word! What a blow! It must have been a difficult talk for you, too, Mr. Garnet."

"It was; it was," said Silver, with the blood in his head again, and he moved away. He was lowering his new prestige by this confidential conversation. And he was

recalling that talk, too ; that talk which later in the day adorned the evening papers, embellished accurately and feelingly, in loyal disobedience, by King Garnet's butler.

At present Silver enjoyed thinking of the wrath to come for the butler. Somehow he never imagined that humiliating scene published in the very papers that seemed such genial friends. But published it was ; and it kept him away from the works, in shame, for the space of some days.

He passed on to the binding-room and saw as in a haze across the lofty place Anna standing beside her still raw recruit at a binder. Anna's instruction seemed, from that distance, to be as punctilious as ever. But he thought her heart must be beating—beating high.

He approached, and felt rather than heard the rustle of dire amazement, awe, anger and trepidation that ran through the room. It was natural to his exalted mood that he should mistake it, however, and he was not displeased. Excitement coursed through him. He cast the shrinking girls smiling looks. He saw no traces of tears on their little, sorry faces. No echo of the consternation in their romantic hearts reached him. He saw and heard only what he wanted.

When Anna opened her lips to ask of King Garnet, something sealed them again—a pride of the strength of which held her silent against herself. And Silver did not speak of him either. Humiliation, which came over him in devastating snatches in the midst of his glories, kept him quiet.

He only whispered : " Now, Anna, you must think of me all day, and to-night I shall come to you, or write to you. My offer's firm." It was not really possible that this dear, strong girl—so wise as she was—was fool enough to refuse it. " Firm, Anna. I want you so. We'll be married just as soon as the thing can be done. What do I want all this for, if not to halve it with you ? " And he believed himself passionately.

" Leave me alone," she said abruptly.

She looked from him out over the binding-room—her room—over her girls. She did not love her work in particular ; but it was hard ; it was clean ; it progressed ; it was a symbol. She thought : " If I do not marry you I go. Of course ! You may not know it now, but in another week of frustration you will know it as well as I do. Oh, of course ! "

She did not resent it. Only the idea wearied a little ; the idea she knew so well from its actual practice—the leaving once more a simple highroad of work for the probable byways of unemployment, poorer work, recurring penury.

He stood by Anna, speaking to her in a louder voice of authority : " A word with you, Miss Land."

So they drew aside and stood under the high and grimy window under which she remembered—vividly in this moment—she had stood with King Garnet.

" Well ? "

He was too full of the pleasing sights and sounds of his imagination to see clearly how white her face was ; how large and rimmed with darkness her eyes.

" What has really happened ? " she replied.

" What has happened ? You've seen a morning paper ? "

" Yes ; but last night ? "

" I went to see them, as you know I intended."

" So late ? "

" If I intend to do a thing, Anna, I do it, whether it's morning or midnight. They took it hard, of course."

" What happened ? " she repeated.

He did not answer.

" I shall do something for that poor fool of a woman, of course," he said ; " a little allowance."

Anna regarded him. She realised him ; his new suit ; his new vanities overwhelming him ; his new power. He did not know that he was fairly light-headed with all this ; but she knew it.

" I will leave you alone to think of me," he said. " And to-night I shall come or write. I love you."

She smiled.

" They are beautiful words," she said doubtfully.

" And true ! " whispered Silver. " True ! " Then he added, " You understand my name is Garnet now. Always has been of course. But I shall keep the Silver. Bertie Silver Garnet's my name. . . . How I wish I could kiss you ! Good-bye."

He was gone.

Anna heard a girl sob.

While Bertie Silver Garnet talked to Anna Land under the grimy window of the binding-room King Garnet and his mother sat in the library of their home and realised to the full their beggardom. Their lawyer was there. He, almost as deeply concerned as they, had explained all. But his explanations were hardly more than reiteration of the abominable news of the night before. He could add little of weight, save to confess that it was true.

" We can fight it, I s'pose," said young King Garnet.

His brow was furrowed, but he was not truly despondent, because the joy of throwing Silver out last night had not yet effervesced. It was a healthy physical joy, and it still bounded in his veins and had made him laugh in his bath this morning, remembering the flabby feel of Silver. He had not known that Silver was a little flabby. He had always taken the thin figure under the baggy clothes he usually affected to be that of a fairly muscular man. But the job had been regrettably easy.

" My boy," said the middle-aged lawyer, " you have no case, and nothing to fight it with. I was hours with Moss & Parkinson yesterday. They have everything ; we have nothing. If your father had only signed that new will ! But he did not sign it ; he was hesitating just at last about leaving a certain amount to charity, and between the choice of charities—and sudden death overtook him.

And we have nothing. There is no doubting facts—every one proved up to the last split hair—which are as clear as daylight. What you and I have to do is to save all we can out of your personal assets for your mother."

"Her jewels," said King, "the cars, the——"

"Her jewels are certainly personal," said the lawyer; "but the cars, the furniture, and so on—well, they have all been bought with your half-brother's money, as you can see, and he has a right to everything there is. It belongs to him. All is his. More belongs to him than that. All that you and your mother have spent belongs to him. Not that it is recoverable, of course. That, as a matter of common sense, is waived. But please try to understand, both of you, that you have nothing."

"My bank balance——"

"You have none. It is not yours."

King Garnet sat back and considered.

"Your debts?" suggested the lawyer.

"They're only reasonable debts."

"Reasonable for a rich man; unreasonable for a broke one. My boy, every creditor you have will be hot on your tracks, and you'll be dunned for the very boots you wear!"

"But look here!"

"Realise it! And you, too, my dear madam, realise it!"

"I can't! I can't!"

She sobbed. She had not slept, and was a bundle of frayed nerves and palpitating fears.

"You must," said the lawyer inexorably.

There was a short silence.

"You will not even be able to pay my account," went on the lawyer dryly. "No." He held up an amiable hand. "I am not saying that in any tactless or offensive spirit. I am bringing it home to both of you—as it is my duty to do—that you have no time to waste, no money to squander at all. You depend on Mr. Bertie Silver Garnet—as he styles himself, I hear—actually to pay off the servants whom you engaged. You have no ability to pay for any

services from anyone. All the comforts or considerations which you may for a very short while continue to enjoy, you have on sufferance. Forgive me. I am trying to bring it home to you in a manner which you cannot evade or misunderstand."

"We're all in," Garnet muttered.

"Briefly, yes. I'm sorry. All my sympathy is yours, dear lady. But you will find that sympathy accomplishes little. You have to brace yourself."

"I can't! I can't!"

King Garnet sprang up and petted and comforted his mother. She wept.

"As for enjoying considerations or comforts by any sufferance of Bertie Silver Garnet's," King said, "there'll be little chance. I've torn that. I threw him out of this house last night, well into the middle of the street, and he'll be sore this morning, I'm afraid. So much for Bertie Silver, damn him!"

He walked about.

The lawyer exclaimed, "You should have kept your temper!"

"You didn't hear what the little louse said!"

"He had a right to say what he liked, young man, and you should have taken it for your mother's sake. We might have arranged something comfortable for her; but if you take the aggressive to the extent of manhandling him we shall do nothing."

"We want nothing from him either."

"Oh, we do! We do!" wailed Mrs. Garnet.

"Mother!" said King.

The lawyer looked benign and wise, and tolerant of them both in their mutual helplessness.

"Tut, tut!" he soothed. "Look here, young man, you must keep your head and your temper. Swallow anything he hands you and keep your fists down."

"I'm damned if I will!"

"I advise you for your own good."

" If he comes here again I'll pitch him out again, same as I did before. It's a game I shan't tire at."

" Listen to me, you young fool. You've everything to learn. Pardon my saying so, Mrs, Garnet, but your son has everything to learn. If he comes here again he can pitch you out, and don't you forget it."

" Let him try ! "

" The law will see to that, Mr. King Garnet. His position is unassailable."

The young man stood looking this way and that bewilderedly.

" Mother," he demanded, " you don't mean you'd ask or take favours from a cur like that ! "

Mrs. Garnet gasped, sobbed, struggled, nodded.

" I do ! I do ! I'd ask and take them from anybody ! "

" Mother ! "

The lawyer looked wise and experienced.

" Your mother is a woman, my boy. Don't allow yourself to forget that. She must be provided for."

There rose suddenly before King the very clear vision of Anna Land.

" Some women would work their fingers to the bone rather than——"

" Oh, King ! Oh, darling ! Have I ever worked my fingers to the bone ? "

" And have you ? " the lawyer demanded, turning suddenly with a shrewd look upon King.

The young man resumed his seat very soberly indeed.

" I never have ; I—I suppose I shall."

" Do you ? " replied the lawyer, without faith.

The young man lifted his head and looked at him, aghast.

Maddox the lawyer began slowly to put together various documents and place them neatly in a small despatch case, watched by mother and son in equal silence. Maddox betrayed by the fluency of his mobile legal face great sympathy ; and also by a certain final sternness counselled

resignation. But Mrs. Garnet, womanlike, broke and rebelled against this. So long had she been secure here, thus—a rich marriage following an extravagant girlhood—with only that uneasy feeling about Silver tucked away in her consciousness so deep as not to disturb her very much, that she could neither admit nor accept the catastrophe. She had never so much as touched poverty with her white finger tips.

"But," she cried, her voice mounting—"but something must be done, Mr. Maddox! Done! I must have enough to live upon!"

"By favour you may get enough to live upon, dear lady; or you might have done if this son of yours, who has a good deal to learn——"

He returned a serious, reproachful gaze upon King Garnet, who sat up and opened his mouth to speak.

"——if this son of yours, my poor lady, had not seen fit to estrange the sympathies which no doubt this quite excellent half-brother of his might have felt. I infer from Moss & Parkinson that Mr. Silver Garnet is really an excellent person in his way. Was it really worth while, my boy, to deal with him so drastically?"

"Worth while! I should damn well think it was!" King shouted. "It didn't last long, but I enjoyed every second of it."

"You should have paused to consider," said Mrs. Garnet in a weak rage, turning upon him.

"Paused, mother? Paused?"

"It was a time for diplomacy," said Mrs. Garnet, her voice mounting again hysterically. "We should have been civil to him—pleasant. He could easily make me a good allowance; not—not this, of course"—hopelessly she looked around her—"but a little flat. I could have had a little flat, a French maid-servant; if I could only have kept one who would have helped with my clothes. I could—I could——"

She struggled against tears, anger and despair.

Maddox the lawyer realized more than she how bitterly her son was hurt; how hard every craven word of hers struck him. She had hit right home. Maddox saw that, although sympathy—more than a mere matter of form—was not his business. He, more than she, read King Garnet's shame and amazement.

"But, mother, you repeat that you'd take it—you'd actually take it after all he said, after all the insults?"

"Oh, words, words!" said Mrs. Garnet, rocking.

"More than words, mother. He didn't come decently. He meant to do nothing but taunt us both, and you know it."

She turned to Maddox.

"You will approach him——"

"Mother! No!"

"You must approach him, Mr. Maddox——"

"I will approach his solicitors, dear lady, although I fear—still, they may feel justified in advising him, and he may possibly take that advice even now; even now." He glanced once more remonstrantly at King. "But one can't say. I hold out no hopes."

"But," cried Mrs. Garnet in her high voice of tension, "what can I do?"

King broke in. "I tell you I shall work, mother!"

She cast him a look much as the lawyer's look had been, without faith. His heart seemed to swell within him.

The lawyer continued, "You have friends, Mrs. Garnet."

"I had friends," she said.

For suddenly she looked clear into the pool of troubles, and her friends were not there with her. And already her mind began to cast about among those throngs of friends. Who were they? Had she an intimate—even one? Did anyone love her? Did she love anyone? When the wealth and the ease which made smooth the running of those scores and hundreds of acquaintances had vanished, did not all else vanish too?

She had laid up no treasures save her son, and in him

she had no faith, believing him to be much as she had made him. All this she did not lucidly understand as yet; but she had taken a very sudden, deep look into that pool of the near future, and its waters were strange to her.

"Ah!" said Maddox, shaking his head. "Ah!" He rose. "In time of tribulation," he added tritely, "we find our friends. We weed them out."

"It is I who am weeded out!" said Mrs. Garnet, quite fiercely for her languid frailty and hauteur.

The lawyer made a sympathetic sound of protest; no more. It had no conviction in it, and carried none. He knew their world; none better. It clothed him and fed him, bought his fine house and car, dressed his smart wife; and he had studied and knew it. He knew it bare; he had seen its naked soul. Greed, pride and revenge were the watchwords of the fights generaled by him; and into his rich office love seldom stepped at all. So he knew the cold weather into which the Garnets were going.

"I shall do all I can in your interests. Rely on me," he promised.

But even already, decent and humane man as he was reckoned, their value was fading, their plight was of no profitable importance. He had not so particularly and personally prized their acquaintance; as business assets they were as good as lost to him.

King Garnet checked him at the door.

"Do you know of a job for me?"

Maddox paused to weigh his answer.

"What can you do?"

"Anything!"

"That means nothing."

They were alone in the dark, shadowy patch by the door of the huge library. Away by the fire, out of earshot of their low voices, Mrs. Garnet drooped and dabbed her eyes. The lawyer felt minded, and kindly he meant it, to speak out to this ornamental youth. He said:

"In the streets of this city are hundreds and thousands

of men as good as you, as useful as you, who are willing to turn their hands to anything—which means they can do nothing well. Have you ever looked aside from your car as you drove through the streets and seen them ? There they were to be seen ; fellows getting daily haggarder with anxiety ; fellows so dumb with shame at their own incapacities—discovered thus late—that they can hardly, sometimes, beg aloud for the job they're after ; fellows with no soles to their boots, hoping the uppers look a bit more respectable than bare feet would do, without overcoats, without a change of linen, without the price of a shave ; yet they must be shaved if anyone's going to listen to 'em ; fellows with their old jackets buttoned up over their bare skin because they've pawned their shirts and waistcoats. They'll run a mile after a cab, hoping to be allowed to lift the luggage on it down for sixpence. And half of 'em are just as competent as you—and that's not saying much, Garnet.

" What I ask is : Have you ever looked aside and seen 'em ? I'll bet I can answer that. You have not ! Now, who is going to look aside for you ?

" You inherited, rightly or wrongly, a big printing works. Did you learn the business ? Could you walk into the works that have been your own and set up a page of a daily newspaper ? I can answer that, my boy. You could not ! And you ask : Do I know of a job for you ? "

Maddox shook his head.

" Go out, Garnet, into the streets of this city—for you'll have to—and learn how other men like you get jobs."

King Garnet uttered no sound. He had hung on Maddox's words. The lawyer held out a hand.

" Good luck ! " he said. " Good luck ! "

" Thank you," Garnet nodded.

Maddox went out. At the soft closing of the door, Mrs. Garnet lifted her tear-stained face from futile contemplation of the fire. She drew her shoulders together and shivered.

"Come here, King. Sit down. What was he saying to you."

"He was telling me the truth."

The door of the library opened again. Furred, scented, velvet-clad, little Mabel Conway fairly burst into the room. Her quiet, demure personality was transfigured; she was distraught, yet enraptured with some passionate project. She ran straight to Mrs. Garnet, although her first look and all her thoughts must have been for King.

"Oh, my dear!"

Mrs. Garnet rose.

"Oh, Mabel!"

They fell upon each other's necks and hugged and kissed and wept. King stood looking on sombrely at the two excited women, till Lady Mabel, still in Mrs. Garnet's clinging embrace, half turned to him and held out a hand. He took it and squeezed it. Then she struggled from the elder woman's arms and gasped her questions:

"Is it true—what all the papers are saying? Have you really lost everything? Is that horrid Silver who hated you so m-m-much——" she broke off with a sob.

"It's true," said Mrs. Garnet.

"B-b-but you'll fight it? You won't let him——"

"We've no fight to put up, Mabel. Everything's proved, clear as daylight. There is nothing to be said or done in any way whatever."

"But, King, what shall you do?"

The question again! He knew what he was by now, of course; but that everyone else should know it, too, and show it so plainly maddened him.

He replied shortly, "Find a job, of course."

"Of course you will," said little Mabel hesitantly.

Then colour began to flow into her pale face. She blushed under the guilt of thoughts which, nevertheless, were causing her a happiness so exquisite as to be nearly pain. "I thought——" she began.

"Yes, darling?" moaned Mrs. Garnet, caressing her hand with eager fingers.

"——that you would come away at once," said Lady Mabel, "and stay with me for a few months, till—till you have made your arrangements. Come right out of all the unpleasantness, both of you. There's room in my little house, and it will be delightful."

"What will your aunt say?" moaned Mrs. Garnet, of the aunt who purported to chaperon Mabel.

"Aunt does as I tell her, always."

"Oh, my dearest Mabel, if you only knew what a weight your dear, kind suggestion lifts from my poor shoulders! I'm so mazed, so tired, so absolutely distraught, darling, that to come and take refuge with you for a while would be just heaven."

"You are to come back with me now in the car," cried Lady Mabel, tremulous with her own unaccustomed resolution, but blushing and radiant through the tears that still filled her shocked eyes.

"Oh, my darling! You dear, true friend!"

"And King?" Mabel murmured, turning to him very touchingly.

"Mabel—mother, we can't victimise Mabel or anyone else."

Mabel uttered a little cry.

"Victimise me—when I'm only longing to have you with me to try to comfort you! Oh, King, she must come! And you——"

"For me, it's impossible, Mabel. A thousand thanks. But there'll be much for me to see to, and—and I must look round at once—and if I'm not turned out I shall stop here to-night to—pack, and so on."

"B-b-but after to-night, King?"

Suddenly, with deep shame, he cried out, "You too! You think I'm useless! A damn man-baby in need of any kind of protection!"

"Oh, I don't! I don't! But I thought——"

"You thought all that was kind, Mabel; only I can't do it. I can't!"

She drew back, irresolute, distressed, doubting her wonderful and gorgeous dream of a plan.

"I want to go back with Mabel," said Mrs. Garnet in a voice of weak obstinacy.

King turned away from the two women. He put his elbows on the mantelshelf and stared down into the fire, hiding his eyes from them. He heard their little murmur of talk and broken planning going on without him. Presently his mother touched his arm.

"Mabel is coming upstairs with me while I give orders what to pack, dear."

"Very well, mother."

He did not move from the fire when they left him.

Time went by; and then King Garnet's mother was beside him again, touching his arm.

"Mabel wants you to come and dine with us to-night."

"I can't. I'm engaged."

Quite suddenly it came to him that there was only one woman with whom he could spend this evening—if she allowed it—and she was far removed from his mother's world, and Mabel's. As soon as he thought of her he became steady. He felt like a rock.

His mother was speaking again, slyly, cajolingly: "King, Mabel is crying."

"I'm sorry. Why?"

"About you."

He said sombrely, "I can do nothing."

"King—why don't you ask her to marry you?"

He was startled out of speech by the greedy naïveté of this. He ground his teeth. Then he took his mother softly but forcibly by the arms.

"See here! You—you've put that up to Mabel!"

"Darling, it wasn't I. Truly! She—she—really, King, she did!"

"What? Mabel said——"

"Listen, dear boy. I'm so upset, you mustn't harass me." She dropped into a chair and felt for her handkerchief. "You must do all I want—or I shall never bear things!"

He stood over her, and suddenly he saw a truth and spoke it.

"You can bear things as well as any other woman."

"I won't be spoken to like that! You mustn't! I'm your mother. Besides, it—it worries me. My nerves are all to pieces. I've a good mind to ring up Doctor Vere and ask him to come around at once."

"You're not the rich patient you were, mother; get rid of your whims and fancies. Any doctor'll tell you the truth now; as will any lawyer. But don't let's side-track. You came here to tell me all that Mabel said."

"Am I not trying to tell you?" She cried a little. "The dear girl's first words when we got upstairs were: 'This will make all the difference in the world to King and me.'"

"How, in heaven's name—when there was nothing between us of any sort whatever? When a thing has never existed, how can it become different?"

"It did exist."

"It did not!"

"She thought it did."

"Because you deceived her. It's you who've done the harm, mother, with your plotting. How silly you women are! Why, I've never even kissed Mabel in a dark car going home from a dance, and she knows it."

"She thought in time you'd care. And you would have cared—so you do care."

"I do not!"

"Listen! Now, listen! And she said: 'Oh, go to him, dearest, and tell him not to be horribly proud, not to let it come between us. You know how I love King!'"

"And she'd be willing to marry me as I am?"

"Willing! My dear, she'd be crazy! And—and she

sees as well as I do that it would answer the whole problem, settle everything. Mabel is a quiet girl—not ostentatious ; doesn't really dress as she might, or live as she might ; few people know how rich she is. I don't believe you know, darling."

"But I'll bet you do, mother!"

"Mabel has fifteen thousand pounds a year. She'd allow me one. You and she——"

He shouted, "You haven't settled the terms, have you? Well, I'm damned!"

"Oh, don't be noisy! My head aches. Settled terms, indeed! You speak preposterously. B-b-but she did ask me to come to you and give you a hint, not to let you stay here unhappy, penniless, at a loose end till that brute turns you out literally."

"You think I would wait for that, then?"

"What else could you do?"

"Don't ask again what I could do, mother. Regarding this proposition of yours and Mabel's——"

"Oh, go to her, King! She's up in my sitting-room, waiting, wondering. Poor dear girl! Go to her, and be happy. All she wants——"

"Do you actually tell me, mother, that little Mabel wants to buy me?"

"You speak preposterously! She knows you love her!"

"I do not!"

"She knows you're proud. She's afraid you won't like to speak now.. So, with great courage, the darling has spoken for you. Go to her, King!"

"Now you listen to me, mother! Listen well! I'm not a little dancing man, or a tame cat, or a toy dog, to be bought at a rich woman's fancy, and be glad to get my keep. You may think me that ; so may Mabel ; but I'm not. I couldn't do it. Mabel's right about that one thing. I've got some sneaking pride anyway. If I were head over ears in love with her, if I were mad for her, I wouldn't ask her to marry me now. I might ask her to wait if I were that

mad. But I'm not. And, mother, Mabel knows it. What she's banking on, where she makes her mistake, is in her summing up of me. She thinks I can't do without my chicken bone and my saucer of cream. I can do without it all as well as the next man. And ask Mabel Conway to marry me I will not ! "

" For my sake ! "

" Not even for yours ! "

" Think it over. She's waiting——"

" Pity to keep little Mabel waiting on a fool's game like this. Go back to her ; tell her from me how I admire her and her generosity—for generosity it is ; and women are very sweet. But help myself to it I will not ! "

" But you'd be making her happy ! "

" I admire your notions of married life and love, old lady. Go back to Mabel and tell her what I say."

" I shall send her to you."

" For the Lord's sake ! If you dare, mother, I'll walk out of this house, and I won't come back even to say good-bye to you."

" Then w-w-will you dine with Mabel and me this evening ? "

" I will not ! "

" Where shall you dine ? "

" Here, I dare say."

" Alone ? "

" I dare say."

" You'll think things over ? Perhaps I've been tactless. I've put it badly. But you're a difficult son, King. If I leave you alone will you think things over ? "

" It's up to me to think a good many things over."

She could extract no better satisfaction from him ; and getting up, she went lachrymosely towards the door. He followed to open it for her. She looked up at his young face, and it was almost like the face of a stranger, set in stern lines she hadn't seen there before.

" W-w-won't you say good-bye to Mabel ? "

" Mother, can't you grasp that, with the answer you're taking her, Mabel won't be very eager to say good-bye to me ? "

" You've humiliated her. How could you ? "

She lingered hopefully.

" Put it down to my stinking pride. Tell her I love her and I leave her if you like. Put it how you like. But—but I leave her. That's understood."

" You should consider her feelings more, not your own."

He laughed, short and grim. She said hastily and uncertainly, " I shall ring you up to-night, King ; and—and mind you ring me up in the morning, directly you wake."

" I won't miss it, old lady."

" After all, you're my son," she said inconsequently, as a sort of reproof for she knew not what. He kissed her and she went out.

He went back to the fire, and the sound of luggage being carried presently through the hall did not penetrate to him ; but he heard the engine of Mabel's car started just outside the window, and going to the window, standing back in the shelter of the thick curtains, he looked out and saw the departure of the two women.

His mother, dressed for the street, was careful, masked, attractive ; there was nothing woebegone about her. With a display of ultra-slim ankles she climbed lightly into the limousine. Mabel, little and subdued, and with an air of anxiety, followed. Both glanced up at the library window, but the thick curtains sheltered the watcher for whom they looked.

So they drove away.

XI.

King Garnet had been waiting all the afternoon for the stroke of six. And at six he was thinking, "At seven I'll go to her. I'll see if she'll let me sit quietly in that odd room of hers and just talk. Both in the same ship now, she and I."

Then it struck him that they were not in the same ship. She had beneath her a solid deck, steam was up and she was headed out to sea, while he merely stood, castaway, out of work, at the harbour's edge, and looked towards an unguessed horizon. He had not found his ship at all.

Garnet was not the only man who was thinking towards Anna at six that afternoon. A stout man had alighted from a taxi-cab at her door, and interrogated the landlady. He waited in that drab person's parlour until Anna came home. The landlady met her with the news.

"There's a gentleman to see you, Miss Land, about yer singing. A stoutish man. Foreigner, miss. I don't mind the looks of him. Shall he come up?"

Anna suddenly sat down on a stair and put her hands over her heart, went even whiter than the thoughts of the day had left her, and replied simply, "Yes."

She gained her room a few moments before the heavy-breathing visitor toiled to the top of the staircase, and she put a match to the fire. The wood was dry and rotten. It crackled and blazed instantly. Her last gift of flowers was fresh, making the mean room look rich. Into the firelight, to the tall, white girl with eyes like flames, came the stout man.

He smiled; and she, who was used to reading men at a swift look, found him honest, also reasonably kind.

"You are the song-bird, hey?"

"I sing," said Anna, her voice trembling because of the beating of her heart.

He smiled again—one saw his large yellow teeth glisten in the firelight—and felt for his cards. He produced one.

"If you would light the gas, miss, you could see my card; and I could see you."

So she lighted the gas, and they faced and looked at each other. They looked very keenly. He was a prosperous man, a clever man. She was a tired girl, a poor girl, in her woollen working frock and her old hat of corduroy pulled down over her brows.

"Read my name, if you please," he invited.

She looked at the card and read that he was Mr. Ferrugi of the Charlton Restaurant; then looked up again and saw that he was using his momentary opportunity to stare at her. His look was vivid, absorbent, yet of so obviously a business nature that it was entirely inoffensive. Again he smiled reassuringly.

"Shall we sit down, Miss——"

"Land—Anna Land. And how rude of me! Please sit down!"

So he took the uneasy oak armchair which she indicated and she took a straight chair by the table. His interested glance roved the room.

"The piano—it is all yours?"

"I have nearly finished paying for the piano."

"I believe you are a true artist, Miss Land, not to be daunted by the difficulties of buying for yourself a fine instrument like that. Besides I know you are a true artist; I have heard you sing."

"You have heard—where?"

His smiling gesture indicated the street.

"I stood outside one night. I was passing—I heard—I waited, and took the address. Now I have the name. And now, may I tell you my errand?"

"Please!"

"You are more eager," he said with an interested look at her, "than I think you will be a year hence. I am the manager of the Charlton Restaurant, as you see. I thought

if your looks equalled your voice that I would like to offer you an engagement to sing at dinner—from 7.30 till 9. You have no other engagements ? "

" No ; I work all day."

" At what ? "

She told him, and he said, " A pity ! " very feelingly.

Emboldened by his frank interest, Anna said : " Of course, I had hoped sometime for some such chance as this. Only I was going to ask for it—when I felt ready. It never seemed as though it could possibly come to me." Under her battered hat brim her eyes glowed.

" Ah, you are young ! " said Ferrugi, alive to the glowing of her eyes. " How nice ! And you are very eager. That makes my errand easier. You would be willing to sing for dinner in the Charlton, hey ? "

She answered in a way that convinced.

" Willing ! Am I not ! "

It made Ferrugi laugh a little.

" You know the Charlton ? "

" Yes. But, of course, I have never been inside."

" Ah, well," said Ferrugi, waving this away, " that side of life is all to come. I will tell you a little of our clientele. The Charlton has a very wonderful clientele, Miss Land. The more important half of the stage ; all society. And if some great foreign impresario visits London he comes to us to dine. Yes, the Charlton is a fine arena for your talent. And we should pay you five pounds a week, and your dinner when you had finished singing."

" I take it," said Anna promptly, with no hesitation or bargaining whatever.

" Of course you take it, child ! " Ferrugi answered. " But first remove your hat."

She threw the old corduroy hat on the table, and the crown of her sleek, shining hair rose unmarred. Then Ferrugi saw that his first impressions were right, and that his new singer was very beautiful.

" You will sing to me, Miss Land ? "

She went to the piano, opened it and sang the Barcarolle of Hoffmann.

Ferrugi did not say what he thought ; he only demanded more. But his small, black and very shrewd eyes were fixed on the top of the girl's head that rose, shining, above the shining piano. He was a business man who knew when he had found a pearl, and he had priced her low, and bought her, and he was well content. As for her, she would have sung as long as he commanded, in a rapture of anxiety to please ; but at the end of the third song he stopped her and came over to the piano. He laid a hand on her shoulder.

" You are very nice ; more than nice. The voice is fine. I'll have a contract made for you, my dear, eh ?—and we'll sign it to-morrow. A year ? "

She half closed her eyes, to recall to herself the power to think undevastated by Ferrugi's piercing black regard ; and suddenly she had an inspiration, a sort of vision of the golden stair rising to the heights, not far away, but sheer before her. And in the strength of that moment's vision she opened her eyes again and said stoutly, " A year is a long time ; three months at a time, renewable—something like that, please."

Ferrugi leaped on the proposition and tore it to shreds, but Anna picked it up and pieced it together, and presented it again. He said she was a foolish girl, a reckless girl, not to assure herself of a year's comfortable employment when she had so fine a chance. He hoped she was not thus early allowing imagination to run away with her. Did she expect at the end of the first three months, then, that some great foreign impresario would hear of her and make her name and fortune on the spot ? These bright things only happened in books, my dear. Come ! Come ! Was not a year's security worth risking a fairy tale for ? But the more Ferrugi talked to her in this prudent and paternal fashion, the brighter did that golden stairway shine, and the more did she hold to her amendment.

So in the end Anna Land got her way and a three month's engagement, with option of renewal.

She had forgotten her supper; forgotten the chilly journey home from the works; forgotten the work—nothing was real but Ferrugi and the Charlton Restaurant. She sat on the piano stool in a dream of happiness. That Ferrugi knew all about it goes without saying, and he laughed at her. He bore no grudge for the girl's caution. He patted her shoulder again.

"Now, my dear, you start from now. What about a frock?"

"I have none," she answered simply.

"The management will provide," said Ferrugi, crinkling up his eyes. "Go to Rosette in Shaftesbury Avenue. Tell her Ferrugi sent you to be fitted out in a very plain sheath of silver tissue with shoes to match at a total cost of fifteen guineas. She will do it. I expect great things to-morrow night. And now, *au revoir*."

As Ferrugi went leisurely down the stairs, King Garnet bounded up them.

Anna's door was still open, and she stood with the light behind her, silhouetted, dark and slender, watching her stout fairy prince depart. Too far removed in her ecstasy from immediate mundane things, she felt no surprise at King Garnet's lightning advent. At the back of her mind she remembered the catastrophe, and yet by the time he had come in and she had shut the door upon herself and him, she had not fully awakened to it. She held out a hand—which he kissed—and she walked back, without a word, to the fire, in which she saw a shining world. Garnet followed her.

"Do you mind my coming here?"

"I'm very glad to see you."

"Anna," he said, puzzled, "turn round and look at me. Don't stare at the fire."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I was far off."

She turned and looked at him, and he saw her radiant,

trying to subdue the radiance as unseemly. His heart missed a beat and bounded on; he stepped back incredulously.

"Anna, something's happened."

"Yes, something's happened."

She shone like the sun and stars; there was no concealing it. For a short while the young man and girl stood looking at each other, she so simple in her joy, he so simple in his dismay, that each emotion was traced plainly on each face. And it seemed to King Garnet that all the insurgent warmth which had filled him as he rushed here was turning to ice.

She was glad.

"You're glad, Anna?" he said in a falling voice.

"Glad! Why, it's wonderful! I'm crazy! I—how can you understand?"

"Only one thing would make me understand—if you loved him."

Anna's mind was on Ferrugi. She stared incredulously back at King.

"And you can't love him! You can't! I always knew you didn't! And a girl like you doesn't marry a man for his money. You've explained that to me clearly enough. You say you're crazy. What do you mean? Anna! For God's sake! You haven't all this time loved Silver?"

Anna caught herself then right back to the present—she had been away into the future—and she was ashamed that her own pleasure and glorification should have come for an instant before King Garnet's troubles, blotting them out. She remembered. He saw the soft changes fly into her face, and with a little passionate murmur he took her hand again and kissed it.

"You read the news in the morning's paper, Anna?"

"Yes," she said quietly, all alive now to his need, "and I heard it before then; I heard it last night."

"Oh, from Silver! That dinner——"

She nodded.

"What difference does it all make, Anna?"

"How—difference, King?"

For the first time she called him by his first name, not realising it. But he realised it and thrilled to the core.

"Between you and Silver."

"Why, none at all!"

He was searching her face, and he saw by the curl of her lip that this was true.

"You mean that, Anna?"

"I mean it. How hard it is for men to believe!"

"Then, what difference does it make between you and me?"

With infinite regret tugging at her, she answered, "None at all, King."

"You want neither of us?"

"I want a very big man."

"Oh, Anna! I will be a big man for you!"

She sat down in the oak armchair, and he cast himself at her feet, his arms on her knees.

"Do you believe that, Anna darling?"

She looked over his head into vague distances.

"I wish I could believe it, King."

"You wish——"

"I want to believe it."

"But—you can't?"

She shook her head very slowly.

"I don't know."

"Take me and make me, Anna!"

"Make yourself!"

His passionate gaze fell. He knew somehow, deep in him, that this girl, beautiful, ardent, desirous, had summed up life with the hard truth of the most elderly cynic, if withal as kindly as a baby. He felt that her seeking eyes looked through all delusions, and yet that she walked with illusions upon the mountain-top. He knew that she put away all unproved sentimentalities, all platitudes, accepted

clichés and texts, even though she clung strongly and sublimely to the greatest faith of all. He sighed.

He said, "I will."

Her look at him had the passion of a young woman and the pitying maternity of an old one.

"You must fight for it."

"Do you believe in me, Anna, in the very least?"

"I will believe in you as long as you keep believing in yourself, King."

He muttered, "It's becoming hard to believe in myself."

He told her of Maddox's diatribe. He half hoped to hear from her some little alleviating cry of protest, of sympathy; but none came.

When he had finished she said, "King, a man must make himself. Women are taught to believe that men are in their hands. It has been convenient to appoint women the bearers of all moral responsibilities. That was taught to me by my mother, who feared to teach me anything that she hadn't been taught before me. I refuse to believe. I cannot take you and make you if you will not make yourself; or if I can, I will not. I would have such contempt for you, King, if you couldn't even do what I, a woman, try to do.

"I think a mother must make her babies; but after a man leaves his mother's hands let him proceed himself. Let him not try to place himself and all his faults and failings to be the charge of some woman, whom he may blame if he fails.

"And just so with a woman, King. She must make herself. Neither man nor woman should lean upon another while either has the power left to stand upright. When you lean on someone else, King, you are a thing to be pitied, not a man to be respected. A bad wife never ruined a good man; and a bad man never ruined the soul of a good woman. We make ourselves; and if we are worth while at all, others cannot make us.

"Ask nobody to make you, King. Stand up!"

There was in King Garnet's mind that actual imminent question which must be answered soon somehow; that question which his mother and Mabel and Maddox had staled by repetition; that he had asked himself: "Yes; but what shall I do?"

Yet now, though he did not see any more clearly which corner to turn, though he knew no road to take, he was ashamed to ask the question of Anna.

She had said to him like a trumpet-call, "Stand up!"

"Yes," he nodded. And impelled by the figurative words, he rose and stood on the hearth rug, looking down upon her. "Yes, Anna, I will."

She remained silent, looking up at him, as if waiting for more than mere promises; her attitude asked "Plans?"

He had none.

All day he had been revolving plans in his head, and they were all foolish and cowardly. They were unmentionable here, anyway.

"Fellows like me, Anna, are terribly handicapped. There are no obstacles; we do no training. It sounds contemptible to you, I know, if I say that to a fellow like me the first time he has to recognise that life is a battlefield, it leaves him fairly sick and stunned. He's no good on that battlefield. He——"

"I know, King, I know. But don't think; not just now; go out and do."

He overcame his hesitation, and asked, "Do what?"

"Find out, King. Work!"

"What work, Anna?"

"Find out, my dear, find out! You are a young single man with no ties. Your mother——"

"My mother will be all right."

"Then you are free, King."

"Yes," he agreed bitterly. "And freedom is all I have."

"It is the second greatest possession in the world, King."

"What is first, Anna?"

"Love; I think love would be first."

Once more Garnet cast himself kneeling at her feet, his arms on her knees. After all, they were both young; he loved her so; to-morrow was far off; there were no problems in this little room. He ached that she should kiss him.

"Let's have done with abstractions for a minute, dear; just for a little minute or two. I must talk about you. Anna, tell me, when did you begin to work?"

"At fifteen."

"Fifteen! But you—you're so well read, so——"

"There are night schools; continuation classes, you know."

"Oh, Anna!"

He made Anna laugh.

"Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives."

"But, Anna, at fifteen! Why?"

"My mother was beginning to be an invalid then, and had to give up a lot of the lace work she used to do in her spare time; I mean in time spared from housework."

"But, my dear, what a struggle!"

"Many people struggle, as you may get better opportunities for observing. And if I seem hard, my dear, it is just that I would like everyone to observe these things. I'm not hard really. I'm not hard, King!"

"Oh, you darling, don't I know it! Can't I see? You, hard!"

He kissed her wrists, emerging very thin from the woollen sleeves.

"But I can't bear to think—I'm so sorry——"

"You wait till I'm sorry for myself, my dear," said Anna. She added in her grave reflective way, "People are in the habit of being much too sorry for themselves."

"Not that you look sorry," King said. "You look radiant to-night, Anna, as if you had a secret. Won't you tell me, dear?"

The gorgeous future again overwhelmed Anna, so that she told him all.

"I have an engagement to sing at the Charlton at dinner every evening, 7.30 till 9 o'clock. And, King, I shall have five pounds a week!"

He looked into her face.

"Oh, Anna, just what does this mean?"

"It means that I've got my foot on the stairs, King, the stairs to all I dream of—I know it! I just feel it in every little bit of me. That fat man you met going down stairs is the manager, and he had just called to engage me."

"How did he know of you?"

The young man was suddenly in a frenzy of jealousy. Impotent to protect by money, by prestige, by name, he now was more fiercely protective than he had ever been. He recalled to himself swiftly the foreign-looking man who had cast him a quick, wise look on the darkish stairs.

Anna was speaking ecstatically, snatched from her determination, her strong composures:

"He heard me from the street, when I practised. He offered me a year's contract, but I insisted on three months only. Because, my dear, I just feel—oh, I just feel this is the beginning of all I hope for! Do you know, when he was here, when he was making terms, I shut my eyes, and an extraordinary sort of half dream, half inspiration came to me. King, I saw success like a—a great golden body. I did, indeed!"

She had no conception of the bitterness that overwhelmed King Garnet as he knelt, listening at her feet. The bitterness of humiliation that this beloved girl should outreach him, the bitterness of loss, the bitterness of all partings, just ate like rats at his very soul.

"Oh, Anna, shall I lose you?"

She came to earth again; to his troubled eyes.

"Oh, King, come after me! Follow me! Pass me! Beat me! Turn round and wait for me! That is what I would have you do!"

He said most desperately, "If I can do none of those things?"

They looked deep into each other's eyes. Hers turned away, but not until they had answered plainly, "You must. You must be big. You must be bigger than I. If you cannot get me you cannot have me."

He sighed, seeking for words, but all were vain.

Instead he asked, after a long hesitation, "Then let me kiss you once, Anna. Be kind. Be soft. Be tender just once. Let me be weak this once. A kiss to take into battle, dear."

She went into his arms for that kiss, so kind, so soft, so tender. But there was only one kiss. The others waited —how long?

Anna Land set out to find the treasure she sought; and far behind her, King Garnet set out too.

XII.

King Garnet walked through the park at dusk. He had found out several things in the short time of two months. One was that the friends of a rich man are not the friends of a poor man. At first he had tried to buttonhole one or two likely men in his clubs and ask them if they didn't know of some job that might be done by a man who could do nothing. Much as the request and the confession stuck in his throat, he was ready to make both; but these former genial acquaintances had a habit of slipping away, of vanishing somehow under his very eyes. A few had condoled; regretted inabilities.

His clubs now knew him no more. Just as Maddox foretold, his creditors had leaped on his back like starving wolves on the back of an escaping horse, and pride made him pay them with a scornful hand as long as he could pay.

That was not long. He walked practically penniless out of the Garnet house twenty minutes before the hour for which Silver had announced his occupation. He refused to see Mabel or to hear of a loan.

"A loan to me," he barked, "means a gift."

He met his mother twice and she found him adamant, a stranger son at whose soul she had never even begun to guess. Then she and Mabel went abroad, to the Cape, where Mabel had inherited interests. They meant to go on to China, to Peking, where Mabel had relations at the legation. They had disappeared, Mrs. Garnet with disguised and frantic relief, Mabel wounded to the heart.

Garnet, then, walked through the park at dusk, quite alone. Already it was a different park, not the loitering ground of the rich, but the kindly shelter of the very poor, whom, night by night as darkness fell, those kind green glades infolded. Sometimes, padding softly and without purpose over the damp grass himself, he had looked at the prone figures, so tired, so purposeless, so lonely. They had always been there. He found himself now for the first time wondering things about them; if they ever dried their clothes, and how; if they ever ate, and what; if they ever had homes, and where. He did not ask himself "How does a man come to this?" He knew.

He knew many things now, things that went close down to the bones of people; things deep in the recesses of souls. It is strange how all those things come to light when the flesh begins to shrink from a man's limbs, when daily another rag or two falls from his back, when his stomach is hungry.

Garnet had not reached any such condition himself; it was weeks away yet. He only knew that he walked down the road towards it; that he began to meet these fallen brethren of his much oftener. They tramped that road; they sat under its cold hedges. It was the same road.

He had kept himself a decent suit of clothes, superlatively cut, but now in need of pressing. He had kept himself an

overcoat and boots, and a certain amount of underwear ; the rest of his clothing had gone.

He laughed the first time he pawned a suit. Now he swore. Yet at the end of two months he was the richer by much learning. He knew of cheap places to eat ; he appreciated the good cheer of a coffee stall ; and a cocktail was now unnecessary as an appetiser before meat. Meat was enough to be glad for. Ever since the first night of Anna's début at the Charlton—when he had allowed himself the luxury of a last dinner there—he had not eaten at any place of such calibre. Neither had he again seen Anna.

King Garnet dreamed of her as he went through the dank park that wet early April evening ; he saw once more the great warm restaurant. Ferrugi brooding over it ; the massed diners ; the warm red and cream of the walls ; the dreamy Slav faces of the orchestra. Then the girl rose up in the sheath of her new silver frock and sang.

His table was not far from her ; she had not seen him. He looked and looked. Talk ceased to bubble and froth through the room when that velvet voice lifted. People stopped eating and waiters paused in their service.

Night of stars and night of love
Fall gently o'er the waters ——

When he could look from Anna's face he glanced around the room to see the impression she made. It was insistent and sure. As his gaze wandered he saw his half-brother. It was at the close of Anna's third song, amid all the bravos and the clapping, that a huge bouquet of pink roses was handed to her by the leader of the orchestra. King Garnet knew they were from Silver.

He saw her search the flowers for a card, find it ; search the audience, find Silver ; thank him with a smile. He himself sent her a note of love, of thanks and adulation by his waiter, and went out. He knew, indeed, that she saw success, as she had said, like a great golden body, very near her. And he kept away from her.

At the end of a month he saw her billed in an advertisement of the Charlton's *thés dansants*. In the afternoons, also, now she sang. So she had left the printing works. Her feet were upon the magic stair and she looked up to the heights which she coveted. As for him, his feet went down, and his pockets were empty, and his heart was sore. But all the same, two months after Anna's début, he was walking through the park, thinking of her just as vividly as if she were there beside him.

That afternoon he had been to Maddox the lawyer. Maddox had stretched a point, knowing that he came as suppliant and not as client, and had of his kindness seen him.

"I want work," said King.

"I have none," replied Maddox.

"Is there no work in all this damned city?" said King.

"Yes," said Maddox, "but it is being done by people who will cling to it for dear life. There are jobs, my lad, but not as many jobs as there are men to fill 'em."

A cup of steaming tea was brought in for Maddox. King Garnet was going without his tea these days—a tiny privation which was nothing to the starker ones he would presently endure—and he thought that never in his life had he seen anything so tempting as that steaming cup. When Maddox said, "And bring a cup for Mr. Garnet," he could have whooped like a small boy who had been promised sweets.

The lawyer asked, "And what have you done so far?"

"I've answered every advertisement——"

"——by post. That's a poor way of getting a hearing."

"So I proved after a week or two. After all, one's got to learn, hasn't one?"

"Yes, and learning never did anyone any harm," said Maddox, stirring his tea.

"After that I went personally after every job I could hear of. Everything, whether I thought I could do it or not. I've gone after as many as thirty jobs in a day. They're generally filled."

"Yes; very often it's a question of beating the quickest."

"Maddox, is this the way to treat men?"

"Why? Did you treat 'em any differently?"

"I? Why, I never—I never attended to that kind of thing at all."

"No; your manager did it for you. What else have you done?"

"I've inserted advertisements."

"Waste of money, with your lack of qualifications. Tried your friends?"

"I have none," said the young man bitterly.

"Come! Come!" said the lawyer, sipping his tea.

"I tell you I have none. I saw a man I knew in the street to-day coming towards me. He crossed the road. I went to a man's club and asked for him a few days ago and he wasn't in the club. But I'd seen him cross the hall to the smoke-room as I entered. I wrote to a man who was at Oxford with me, and has a general merchant's business in the city; he was awfully sorry, too busy to see me just then—and had no vacancies anyway. Those are the things I—I can't swallow, Maddox. A smack in the face from a stranger is one thing; the cold shoulder from one's friends is another. I can't go on with it."

"You mustn't be squeamish. Better men than you have stood the cold shoulder, my boy."

"What's your advice, Maddox?"

"Persevere, Garnet. Persevere. Unfortunately there's nothing I can do personally."

That bland and cautious sympathy sent the blood into Garnet's face. He rose and went out, thanking Maddox—for nothing. He prowled through a London evening, hungry, tired, disheartened; and at last went into a little old eating-house off the Haymarket, where, for a ridiculously small sum, a man could stand at a long deal counter and eat wonderful meat pies.

There came to him a vision of Silver Garnet sitting in

the comfortable Garnet house, at the long polished table with the delicate lace mats on it, and the silver bowl—Florentine work—heaped with bloomy fruit in the centre of the table, and the red and amber wines in decanters of old cut glass.

A new butler—the old man who had witnessed Silver's ignominy was no doubt gone—was moving to and fro with the dishes in their perfect order. And at the head of the table, silhouetted against the tall carved back of his chair, Silver's face, at once easy and cruel, mean and passionate, smiling, brooding. On the gray walls two or three big canvasses—old Dutch flower paintings on dark backgrounds; on the long hearth odorously burning logs. There, master of all he surveyed, sat Silver Garnet.

As a matter of fact, that night Silver Garnet was not at home at all. He was dining, as often now was his custom, at the Charlton. Often, if Anna did not give him the slip, he managed to drive her home. Often his roses and violets and lilies and Malmaisons came to her *via* the leader of the orchestra—not that Silver's bouquets were the only ones Anna Land received. But from King there were no bouquets. Only that first adoring note, then silence. She looked for him, she wondered about him, she dreamed of him; her heart ached. Ferrugi respected her highly for her obviously wealthy friend.

On the night that King Garnet was eating his supper in the little place off the Haymarket, Silver did not drive Anna home, however. He was there, and he had planned to do it; but Mrs. Aveline dined at the Charlton also. She and Paul Bobby were within twenty yards of the orchestra, and she had come to hear her sister sing.

"Good Lord!" said Paul Bobby, as soon as Anna appeared, looking straighter and slimmer and somehow more triumphant than ever. "What a beauty your sister is!"

"Hush!" said Lucia, her restless eyes on Anna.

They listened in silence to that glorious voice. Lucia

said amid the bravos that followed as Anna bowed and vanished: "Her voice is lovely, Paul, isn't it? It is better than ever; stronger, fuller, richer. She's getting a lesson a week from a good master now; and, of course, she's feeding herself better. She's living softer. Soft living is what all women must have if they are to flourish."

"Of course," the youth murmured. "Women are flowers."

"Women are flowers," repeated Lucia. "Not that Anna will ever admit anything in the way of weakness."

"But, surely," said Paul Bobby, "there was never any question of a girl so lovely as that living otherwise than softly."

"You don't know Anna. She's a Spartan creature."

"But surely——"

"She worked in a printing works! Actually, she worked, my dear! She had no money, you see, and the way my last adorable husband left me tied up prevents me from helping relatives in any substantial way."

"But——"

"Oh, I know all you would say, dear. But independence has been her creed."

"It is too hard for women to be independent."

"I always thought so, Paul. Of course, Anna could have married easily."

"Easily, Lucia! With a face like that!"

"And well, too. But she's queer, Paul. So queer! She wants what she calls the best in life. Only she won't consent to get it my way."

"Your ways have met with every success, Lucia, anyway. Not that you could fail to be successful, you darling, adorable, delicate, porcelain thing, you!"

Over Lucia's face actually fell a blush that showed through the mask of cosmetic.

"I suppose I am rather absurd and porcelain-looking, Paul. My dressmaker always says the same."

"There's an eternally tempting fragility about you, Lucia, that somehow enrages and intrigues one."

"Paul, shall we dance to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, dear? When?"

"In the afternoon?"

"Rather!" The boy was relieved to find that the evening was not her intention, for he had intended, if money could be borrowed, to take a very young, very fair and precocious girl out to dine. "At four o'clock, Lucia?"

"At four. The Legation Club." Their fingers touched

Lucia knew this was not romance. She knew it! She knew it! It was so poor an imitation that no woman under fifty, however fond, could have been dazzled by it. Yet so little exacting do women of her type become as their attractions wane that she could make it do very well. She could even think over it and fondle it on lone lazy afternoons by her bedroom fire as she rested; and deceive herself over it, and work herself into a rapture about this fluff of philandering which would have left a little schoolgirl, royal in her young prettiness, cold.

Paul Bobby's foot touched Lucia's under the table; his silk-clad ankle brushed her silk-clad one. He was once more out of a part and entirely at a rich woman's disposal.

"Order more wine, Paul. You like this wine?"

"You are a wonderful judge of wines, Lucia. Waiter!"

Mrs. Aveline was nearly always happy at dinner. The evening was the time of day for which one saved oneself. One's energies were conserved, one's good looks directed towards this hour. She had been under the hands of a facial masseuse most of the afternoon. She had had a mask plastered over her face, where it dried, and then was wiped off again. One's complexion emerged fresher, one's skin tauter. All the while she had lain immobile under that mask for fear of cracking it, her thoughts had been on Paul Bobby. Later on she had made herself up exquisitely, assisted by Marie, an adept at the art. She had dressed in white, with her pearls.

But just as this philandering was but a pitiful imitation of the true romance so was Mrs. Aveline but an imitation of the youth of the extremely young, fair, precocious girl to whom Paul Bobby would make love to-morrow—if he could borrow the money to entertain her as she demanded. He watched Lucia languishingly, out of sheer practice.

Another bottle of wine came; was placed in the ice bucket beside them. Then the wine waiter poured the golden wine reverently into their glasses. As Anna emerged again from her obscurity behind the grand piano to sing, Lucia lifted her glass and toasted her sister gayly. The act, so slight that perhaps no one observed it but Anna, warmed the girl's heart. She loved Lucia and hated Paul Bobby. She began to sing the memorable song of which people never tire:

> "*Falling leaf and fading tree,*
> *Lines of white in a sullen sea,*
> *Shadows rising on you and me——*"

With the first notes of Tosti's "Good-bye" the great room hushed again; hardly a fork clattered on a plate; the waiters stood listening or moved so softly that they scarcely disturbed the still, heavy air. And the words fell on Lucia's heart. Their impact hurt so that all the transient fires of the evening died out of her; so that she felt dead and cold. The adoration of the glitter of life, which flickered but fitfully in her these days, faded to desolation. Now and again, turning her eyes to right or left, she saw other women with just that stricken look concealed on their faces that she was trying to conceal. And men all had memories. Only here and there some very young, blank girl who had never yet said good-bye to anything she wanted and who had not contemplated a tragedy so dire, sat immune. Anna sang:

> "*Hush! A voice from the far-away!*
> *'Listen and learn,' it seems to say:*
> *'All the to-morrows shall be as to-day;*
> *All the to-morrows shall be as to-day.'*"

Not very far from Lucia's table, not very far from the singer, sat Silver Garnet. In their lonely roving Lucia's eyes found him and remembered. Where had she seen that saturnine, dark face before, lighted, as it was now, by human desire, though not fearful—as it was now—of the good-bye ?

She recalled the occasion with an effort. He had been entering that dingy room of Anna's as Mrs. Aveline left it. Of course !

The silver-clad figure slid to obscurity again, and Lucia touched Paul Bobby's arm.

" Do you see that man there ? That dark, sallow, rather sullen creature ? That is Silver Garnet, who was in all the papers over that extraordinary affair of the Garnet Printing Works. He's very rich, and crazy for Anna."

Paul Bobby looked enviously at the very rich man.

Lucia went on : " Mrs. Garnet has gone abroad with the Conway girl. I used to meet them both frequently at the Minstones' house. They say she simply wouldn't stay to see her son go to the dogs—you know, the boy who had to give up the family money and everything else to Silver Garnet."

" What happened to him ? "

" Nobody knows exactly. Anyway no one could do anything. I suppose he'll get work of some kind. His poor mother was absolutely broken-hearted. He ought to have married the Conway girl."

" Could he ? "

" Could he ! My dear Paul, she's one of those little devoted women just made to be trampled on by some man ; to give all and ask nothing. They say she was in love with him too. But he disappeared, no one knows where. How easily people are lost and forgotten ! "

Her eyes dilated a little.

" He ought to have married the girl," said Paul Bobby. " What a fool ! "

" You'd have married her, Paul ? "

Carefully, Bobby paused.

" Oh, well, Lucia darling, I'm such an idealist, aren't I ? "

" Oh, Paul, I love to think it ! Few men are ! Few men are ! " She sighed tragically ; and then said happily, " I thought I knew men—till I met you. Now I know there's another side."

It was the rose hour after dinner. The wine was full amber, the lights were soft and a woman looked her best.

Paul Bobby was turning his small immediate difficulty over and over in his fairly agile brain. He kept to the topic of Silver and his riches, which came conveniently just now.

He said : " Wonderful face he's got, isn't it ? That dark complexion, that projecting jowl, which ought to mean strength, oughtn't it ? And all the coin he wants ! Lord ! "

A little feeling ran coldly through Lucia ; a feeling that this youth was asking indefinitely for money. He had done it before and she knew his approaches. Yet she dared not allow herself to feel contempt for him ; that would make her too unhappy. She must cling to her delusions, for they had a habit of failing her too often. Suddenly she wished to offer before Paul could ask, which would save the situation somewhat. " Oh, Paul dear, how are things now ? "

" I'm as broke as a new kitten. Not that I'm not used to that, of course. It's all right."

She was so glad that Paul Bobby was brave, that she dipped her hand into her vanity bag, under the table, found two five-pound notes and pressed them into his hand, which was also at that moment under the table.

" Dear Paul, I insist ! Aren't we—great friends ? "

After all, it was nearly three months since she had actually lent—or given—him money. He had the run of his teeth in her house, and the car ; and she had, of course, paid for dinners and lunches ; and she saw that he enjoyed her dance club free of subscription often enough.

His hand closed on the notes.

" We're such friends ! "

" Friends, Lucia, you adorable darling ! Aren't we more than that ? "

It was perhaps because Lucia knew in her secret soul, where she seldom dared to look, that they were not even friends that she pulled her cloak round her shoulders precipitately, paid their bill and went. At the same moment Anna disappeared from the orchestra dais, and Silver quickly paid his bill too, not knowing that Anna had a rendezvous with her sister and would escape him.

All three, Lucia, Anna and Paul Bobby, converged outside the restaurant, where Lucia's car waited. Silver was a moment or two behind, but in time disappointedly to witness the women's departure. In the little coupé, when Lucia and Anna had squeezed beside the chauffeur, there was not room for Paul ; and they drove off without him, leaving him standing bare-headed, smiling, upon the pavement. Something in the perfection and finish of the young man's outward accoutrements of manner and body—a perfection to which Silver Garnet did not attain—made up Silver's mind. He spoke.

" We've met somewhere." They had not.

" More than once, I believe, Mr. Garnet," Bobby returned ; " but these occasions somehow slip one's memory. My name's Paul Bobby."

" Ah-ha ! " said Silver. " Of course ! And mine you seem to know—I mean, to remember."

" Oh, you're a personality and easily remembered," Bobby returned. " I'm not."

" What are you doing ? " said Silver. " My car's here. Come along with me to have a drink at my house, will you, and—ah—renew our acquaintance."

He did not know that Bobby knew what he knew—that they were total strangers. He just thought the young fellow was too polite to confess himself all at sea. And he'd known Silver Garnet by name and at sight. Such is fame.

Silver felt a swell at his heart. He touched Bobby's arm, and motioned him into the cushiony depths of the

limousine. He had an admirer and a listener. Silver Garnet was as yet a lonely man.

The sisters drove away from the Charlton hand in hand. There was something about Anna which always made Lucia want to hold to her, to lean upon her, and not to let her go. She seemed a steadfast thing in a vacillating world. This she would never have dared to say ; it seemed so starkly to admit disaster. But perhaps the younger woman understood it well enough by the clasp of that restless, ringed hand round her own cool fingers. When last they had met the gulf between them had seemed a wide one. Now it seemed bridged more or less by Anna's silver frock, her silver shoes, her evening cloak of dense black velvet. These women now met on a mutual ground other than the mutual ground of their wistful sisterly love.

Lucia had not long been back from Cannes ; she had lingered there longer than her first intention ; life had no particular objective, and one place was as good as another. Moreover Paul Bobby had been nothing loath to come over and visit her there ; to be her guest for weeks at a time. She returned in the middle of a cold April to find Anna upon her golden stair.

" Well, dear," she said as the car left the Charlton and rushed towards Piccadilly.

And Anna said simply, " Well, Lucia." And with mutual accord they turned their faces and kissed.

" Things look very well, indeed, with you, my dear," said Lucia approvingly and eagerly. She felt the texture of Anna's velvet with a thin, glittering hand.

" Things," cried Anna, " are gorgeous ! "

" Tell me everything," said Lucia.

So Anna began joyfully at the beginning, as women love to do, losing no word of the tale from the first. " I was doing so-and-so and so-and-so, when "—proceeding up the steps—" and then—and then "—to the very summit and climax. Lucia listened, ravished. It was strange how the

woman of the world who had gained much and lost much, who knew all, yet had no true learning, hung upon the girl's recital. Not until Anna had quite finished did she pause to feel the waves of wistful pleasure and relief that were passing through Lucia communicating themselves to her. Such pleasure in another's triumphs, emanating from Lucia, was for some reason heartbreaking.

"It's splendid, my dear," she said over and over, when Anna had stopped. "Splendid! When you wrote to me at Cannes you were so very guarded——"

"I didn't want to shout too soon."

"You are going to succeed, dear. You must succeed. I know it. I sat and watched people's faces to-night. You will get private engagements."

"Lucia, I have been offered several."

"I am glad! Glad!" said Lucia. And then for no reason at all she broke up and wept, but stopped herself as soon as she had begun, with the practised control of a woman who has longed to weep much but feared to disturb her complexion. She coughed away the sobs in her throat. "I wonder," said she, "if I ever had a talent, anything I could have worked with. I wonder——"

"You used your talents socially, Lucia."

"I did not, my dear. I used no talents at all. My face carried me where I wished to go; that and a—a sort of *joie de vivre* which poor mother never succeeded in squeezing out of me. Oh, well, you have the *joie de vivre*, too, Anna. Curb it. Control it. Make it—make it work for you in some way that will last."

"I was telling you about my private engagements," said Anna after a sober pause. "Two duchesses and a countess have engaged me for afternoon receptions. I am to sing—as a paid professional, Lucia—at a charity concert that royalty is patronising!"

"I am glad!" cried Lucia with hysterical fervour.

"I know you are, you dear!" said Anna, pressing her sister's hand.

They came to Lucia's small house, set between bigger ones in an exclusive street. Lucia had sat on the left of the car, with Anna between her and the chauffeur, so that even if the servant's attitude were not always that of the most perfect aloofness he need not have noticed her slight and silent break into emotion. Now her face was calm again, even gay.

"Bring the car back again in half an hour for Miss Land, Gordon," she ordered as she stepped out.

Anna followed her into the small warm hall of a uniform rosiness, where incense burned somewhere. They went upstairs to the drawing-room. Marie brought the bedtime hot milk and biscuits, and vanished as quietly as she had come.

"Hot milk is awfully good for the skin if a woman is on the thin side," Lucia remarked, sipping. "Never forget that, my dear."

"Thank you, Lucia."

"I saw that Silver Garnet man admiring you to-night, Anna. Won't you marry him now?"

"I can't, Lucia."

"Did you know young Garnet, Anna? The other one? I remember I've danced with him at the Minstones."

"I know him, Lucia."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know," said Anna steadily; and when she said it she knew she was as frightened as a mother with a lost child.

"Would you have married him, Anna, if he hadn't lost his money?"

Anna's shake of the head was short, for she brooked no questions now about King. She could not bear them. They became an impertinence too great to condone.

"Strange, strange child!" sighed Lucia, looking at her sister over the rim of her milk-glass.

"I want a man bigger than myself, Lucia."

"There are none," said Lucia with the smile of a painful learner twitching one corner of her mouth. "If you knew

as much about men as I do you would know that they are weak—weak! You must take them and make them what you want. Although," she added, "I do not know why I say that—I, who never made anything of any man, as I know now."

"Men and women both should make themselves, Lucia. It's such a weak cry, so unworthy, blaming other people for everything."

"Dear Anna! Darling Anna!" said Lucia with great earnestness. "I do hope you get what you want! I think I hope it more than anything in the world, and now, dear, you listen to me. Tell me: What would you think, what would you say, if I married Paul Bobby?"

"Paul Bobby! That——"

"You may say it, Anna."

"—— that puppy, that little dancing man!"

"He—he understands one," muttered Lucia.

"You couldn't, Lucia!"

"One could do it very easily."

"A fourth husband!"

"I've never been really happy yet. I know it now."

"He wouldn't make you happy if he could."

"One wants an objective," Lucia murmured.

"You have no dog," said Anna, looking around the room. "Try a Pekingese; or a poodle perhaps."

"You are horribly cruel!" cried Lucia. "Oh, horribly, horribly cruel!"

"Only to be kind," said Anna. "Lucia, do you mean Paul Bobby has asked you?"

Lucia shook her head.

"He wouldn't, of course. He's poor; I'm a rich woman——"

"That wouldn't stop him."

"There is a difference in our ages; a few years."

Anna reckoned silently the difference. Eighteen years probably separated Lucia and Paul Bobby, but she did not say so. All she replied was, very slowly, "I suppose so."

"It would be up to me to—to let him know that—that he could do so," said Lucia, and she flushed scarlet.

"Like Queen Victoria," added Anna very slowly, and not looking at her sister. But she felt Lucia's flush as if the disconcerted glow of shame were her own.

"He is awfully in love with me," said Lucia jerkily. "Devoted."

Anna remained sitting on the hearth rug, looking into the fire; and Lucia in her easy-chair looked at her sister for quite a long while in silence. Lucia broke it.

"There are ways and ways of letting a man know——"

Anna rose.

"Good-night, darling."

"Good-night, darling," Lucia responded in a small and shaken voice, yet somehow doggedly.

Anna picked up her cloak, swathed it round her in silence and went out, leaving her sister still sitting by the fire with that flush on her face and her lips set tight.

As Anna drove home in Lucia's coupé she still wondered, like a mother over a lost child, about King Garnet. But Garnet was not so far from her as she feared and imagined. He had eaten his pies in the little cook-shop a stone's throw from where her velvet voice charmed five hundred men and women; he had wandered round the Charlton with some instinct of being near her; some hungry instinct of the forsaken man giving way to his despair. He had seen a scowling man emerge from the back door, an Austrian, a waiter summarily dismissed for some misdemeanour. This voluble one spoke to the loitering stranger and voiced his woes. An hour later King Garnet—who had waited humbly for a hearing all that time, hat in hand—was given the foreigner's job. It was late and he was the only applicant; he was on the spot; his address and manner were perfect; he promised credentials of respectability next morning—and duly got them from a pompously dismayed Maddox. He was at work! He was in heaven!

XIII.

For many days King Garnet worked at the Charlton before he spoke to Anna or before she saw him. He was on the far side of the big restaurant, and very busy. Hitherto he had looked at restaurant life from the other viewpoint; now he looked at it from the wiser eyes of a servitor. There were no wages—only tips, and a waiter was reckoned lucky to stand the chance of serving the Charlton's patrons. King knew that a hundred slick men of several nations waited to jump into his shoes. The last months had taught him that. Now he fawned where before he had condescended, and he did not even trouble to worry over the probabilities of old acquaintances dropping in. Many of his former friends were on the Riviera, anyway. And if they came he did not care. He had seen the truth that a destitute man can barely cling to his self-respect; but a man with an honest day's work to do may hold up his head with a prince.

One day he had served a dismayed Maddox obliviously. But for a long while—it seemed a very long while—he did not speak to Anna.

He watched her every evening as she rose from her obscurity behind the grand piano, like a silver star out of a sombre sky, came forward and sang. He was proud to love her, wretched at her ascension. But also he saw Silver watching her. He set a poor system of espionage to work, and learned that sometimes she left the restaurant in Silver's car. He feared greatly. At last he sent her a letter.

That evening he had his reward. As she came forward to sing she looked out over the heads of the people to where he stood at the far end of the great room, waiting upon a client's wishes. For a second across that rosy space their looks met and fused. That night she sang the Barcarolle for him. He knew that the song was his alone.

And then, after the Barcarolle, she responded to the applause with a little song which he had never heard before; which reminded him of some nursery rhyme or game, he could not recall which. The accompaniment was like the spring of the year, fresh, delicately sweet. She sang:

"*I sent a letter to my love* ——"

He assured himself, "She has answered it."

Indeed she had! When he returned to his room in a street far less attractive even than that mean street in which Anna had made a place called home, he found the letter, saying:

"Come to tea to-morrow at four. The same address. The same Anna. Everything the same."

It was midnight and the cold room was cruel. King Garnet sat at the table and laid his head down upon his arms and could have cried.

"Nothing's the same," he said aloud. "Nothing! Nothing!"

He did not cry; he was too ashamed, even there, privately before himself; but when he lifted his head his eyes were all the more tired and red.

That night, while King Garnet still waited alike upon Jew and Gentile, lavish and mean, Anna was driving away from the Charlton with Silver. It was not Silver's importunity which brought her into the well-known depths of his big car so much as Lucia's. Lucia had sent a note of frantic imploring, begging her to bring this queer hero of a hundred garbled tales to supper.

"I shall be glad to meet your sister," said Silver as he leaned back beside Anna. "I have seen her several times dining at the Charlton, and once coming out of your rooms, you remember, in the bad old days that neither of us want to remember, eh, my dear?"

"I have nothing that I want to forget, Silver."

He had asked her now to use Silver as his first name.

"You all over, that!" he said. "Never admit regrets or defeat or sorrow, eh, Anna? Well, I'm delighted to be going with you to your sister's house to-night; partly because she's your sister, partly because, my word, she's a smart woman, is Lucia Aveline! Partly because I've linked up in a way with a friend of hers—that young chap she goes about with so much."

"You don't mean a worm called Bobby?"

"Paul Bobby. You're very superior, my dear. Bobby's an awfully smart fellow; knows all the best people in town, gets invited anywhere."

"I know he'll do anything for his dinner," said Anna.

"Who won't if the dinner's in the right house?" Silver replied earnestly.

His earnestness interested Anna so much that she turned to stare at his face under the electric light in the roof of the car, and he looked thoughtful.

"The right house, Silver?"

"That's where I don't quite come in yet," said Silver; "but I will! I will!"

"Climbing seems so funny," said Anna.

He glanced at her testily.

"Not so deuced funny either. Besides, a man can buy his way in anywhere now if he knows just how. I imagine young Bobby knows exactly how. Well, I'm proving that he does."

"I don't see what he can do for you."

"He's my private secretary."

"Silver!"

"I've plenty of uses for a fellow like that, my child; and he's someone to talk to. Days get long sometimes; nights too. 'Course, I shan't interfere with any good acting engagement the boy happens to get. He can have his evenings if he must have 'em."

"So that's why Lucia has been crazy to get you," Anna contemplated.

Silver repeated: "I'm awfully glad, I say, to have a

chance of going to one of your sister's smart little supper parties. Her invitations are angled for quite a bit, I understand."

"Her invitations are angled for," thought Anna, "not Lucia; not the woman herself."

Silver went on: "I spoke to young Paul Bobby one night when you drove home with your sister from the Charlton, and left him cold on the curb, poor boy! Well, I had an idea we'd met somewhere, you know"—Anna did not detect this lie, and Silver almost believed it by now, so had he impressed it upon the soft and ruthless young Paul—"and he said he distinctly remembered. Recognised me at once; and anyway, he was a friend of your sister's. Link enough. He came back with me for a drink; awful nice, candid, sympathetic chap; understands one's viewpoint so well. We fixed up our little arrangement that very night."

"So Paul Bobby is going to help you play the rich man."

"Dunno that I need much help, m' dear. I'm in full possession of all my faculties, I think. Only, I could very well do with the services of a private secretary; and if I like to engage one, why, I suppose I'm free to do it."

"None freer."

"Well, then," Silver Garnet added.

He took her hand and fondled it under the fur rug.

"And us, Anna? How about us?"

"Things are the same."

"You adamant girl, you! I say what I've said before; it doesn't suit a woman to be ice and stone."

She felt that Silver Garnet never guessed this ice and stone to be so thin a crust as not to cover with any safety all the softness and the fires that burned beneath. Like many men, he did not know. Like many men, his anger with the ice crust kept him from assaulting it dangerously.

She smiled and asked softly, "Why do you trouble about me so, Silver?"

"Because I want you so."

She suffered him to hold her hand in a hot clasp.

She asked presently, "Rich man, how long is it since you addressed the fraternity on the arrogance of capital and the division of wealth and the nationalisation of property?"

Silver did not reply at all; but, looking sideways, she guessed the uncertain disclaimers hovering on his lips. He still remained only on the brink of utterance when they drew up before Lucia's house in that quiet Mayfair side street. Other cars were parked there too.

The buttoned boy who answered the door received Anna with a smile, and took Silver's coat and hat with the perfect manners that Lucia always required and obtained from those about her. Silver followed Anna upstairs behind a parlour-maid, sniffing the aroma of incense. The incense mystified and impressed him. Also, he was delighted with this tiny house of perfection and the cars parked outside, and their rich occupants, who were within Mrs. Aveline's small drawing-room.

He took his bearings, acknowledged introductions, noted identities, with a swell of gratification. He no longer hated this comfortable, easy-spoken and well-bred class, but saw that it was good, and aspired to be received right into it, with no dubiousness about his position.

And this sister of Anna's, this little, thin, frail, yellow-haired, tired siren of indeterminate years, how graciously she smiled and took his hand! How exquisite her gown was, trailing behind her in a long fish-tail train! How womanly and placating and soft and languid she appeared! She made a man feel just right with himself; also that the world was right and all there for him.

"At last!" cooed Lucia's drawly, reflective voice—behind which there was so little reflection. "At last I have you here! Come with me. . . . Mr. Silver Garnet, Lord Ivinghoe."

At supper Silver Garnet sat on Lucia's left hand, facing

Ivinghoe on her right. Ivinghoe was one of Lucia's very old gentlemen who considered her a quite delicious young woman; but he needed much playing up to; and hereditary gout kept him mainly at Bath or at Baden. But when Silver saw this old man fondle Lucia's fragile wrist, look with his rheumy eyes into her tricky ones, heard him pay her outrageous compliments, he himself thought her rather wonderful too.

Lucia had a purpose in persuading Silver to her supper table that night. She had heard from Paul Bobby of his appropriation of this new rich man, and she burned to further Paul's cause. She meant to make herself charming to Silver, to make him feel at home, to believe himself possessed of graces and *savoir-faire* which he lacked. According to this plan, she laid herself out now to please and be pleased.

Paul Bobby was an instant link between them, a congenial topic for conversation to turn to. Lucia had already heard of the strange encounter; but she listened innocently while Silver told it again, as if every word surprised and intrigued her. She was past mistress of that art of any feminine woman—the art of listening to a story twice with an engrossed air.

"You must be a tremendous judge," she punctuated at times; and, "But then you have a genius for judging men; someone told me so. I shan't tell you who." She could not have told him anything of the sort. And, "Some men can read character at a glance—I always say it takes an immensely powerful character to do it; to dare to summarise in an instant and back one's judgment. But you're probably a man who makes few mistakes and dares anything. I think you are."

"I am," said Silver. "Few people think so perhaps. Few people have had an opportunity of summing me up yet."

"Ah, that's your fault. When everyone's dying to know you!"

"Aha! You flatter me, I'm sure."

"I don't. I don't flatter. You're not fool enough to be successfully flattered, Mr. Garnet; and I'm not fool enough to do it, though I may look a bit of a featherhead."

"I admire your featherhead."

He looked, experiencing that curiously swollen feeling of joy which so easily inflated him, at her yellowy head with the string of diamonds round it. Old Ivinghoe lifted an old ladylike lorgnette—his affectation—and stared.

Lucia shook her featherhead and purred. Then: "Well, you've shown your discretion in picking Paul as a private secretary. I don't believe anyone but you—and I—realise what a brilliant boy he is."

"So it's our secret, eh?"

"You don't mind my sharing it?"

"Rather not!"

"Are you going to work Paul very hard?"

"Well, he seems to want to be busy. His head's full of financial games that I don't get the hang of quite yet."

"That you don't get the hang of! Oh, don't tell me!"

"I believe you think me smarter than I am," he said in a modest voice, but inwardly inflated by that delight and pride with which his company informed him.

"I don't. I couldn't," Lucia replied.

"But who are these people who want so much to meet me, Mrs. Aveline?"

Lucia did not know. She looked a thousand mysteries, therefore, laughed, and answered, "When I have weeded out those many people very carefully you shall meet my selections here."

"You're going to be a sister to me," he declared with meaning.

Lucia caught that meaning. She looked down the table, at the foot of which sat Anna, raised an eyebrow and sighed.

"I wonder."

Silver looked at Anna, too, and said, suddenly a little sombre, "Well, so do I."

"Talking of sisters," said Lucia, "where is that nice brother of yours, with whom I can remember dancing several times at the Minstones?"

"I don't know the whereabouts of my half-brother, Mrs. Aveline."

"Your most attractive stepmother is abroad, I hear. We've sat on committees together, I believe, in aid of something."

"She's abroad with—with——"

"Lady Mabel Conway."

"I have every sympathy with my stepmother," said Silver, who was becoming much softened by Lucia's accomplished hand stroking his prickles; "but she seems inclined to cold-shoulder me. Resents me, you know."

Lucia knew Mrs. Garnet enough to disbelieve in the cold shoulder.

"That must be put right here," she said confidentially. "You must meet her again, quietly, and Lady Mabel. Darlings, both of them."

Silver acquiesced.

"You know, I'd love to do something for my stepmother. Poor woman. It's rough on a woman, isn't it?"

"I believe you're the kindest-hearted man I know," Lucia murmured, with a charming look.

Silver glanced down the table again at Anna, and back to the little fair woman who watched him.

"Are you my ally?"

"I am," Lucia smiled, and nodded.

She had made up her mind during that intermittent talk, interposed with prosy interruptions from old Ivinghoe, that here was really a most malleable man, prickly, stupid, vain, with an ego that swamped everything else within his sight; but at the same time malleable, and so rich.

"I want her to let me give a concert for her," said Silver. "Take the Queen's Hall, advertise her well. I know it would please her if she'd let me do it. Will you try your persuasions?"

Lucia tried them later on, when a few people still lingered over the bridge tables, but Anna and Silver were departing.

"Anna, have you really decided not to let anyone help you? To go on with this restaurant singing and private entertaining for ever? Because that's what it amounts to. It doesn't really lead anywhere important. You ought to give a concert, advertise well. I wish I could do it for you; but, as you know, I mayn't. My last adored one's trustees——"

"You know that I hate to take anything from anyone, Lucia."

"I know, darling. But hasn't even this tiny glimpse of a more tolerable life shown you that the world is full of good things?"

Anna nodded.

"Why don't you make him give a concert?"

"Silver Garnet?"

"Yes, darling."

"I couldn't. He wants to marry me."

"You needn't marry him merely because he gives a concert for you. Think it over. And, darling, do you know he's got Paul?"

"I know." Anna added dryly, "One leech on him is enough, surely."

Lucia tried to reply resentfully, but her voice suddenly choked and her eyes were suffused with tears; and she turned abruptly away from Anna into the room again. Anna was left, smitten with compunction, on the top of the stairs, with the waiting Silver half way down them.

Thus, since Lucia had turned away from her compassion and apology, the compassion was all ready for Silver when, in the car once more, he reiterated his plea to be

of service to her. It amazed and baffled all his new pride that this girl held so aloof, and some of his sore amazement crept into his hurt voice.

"Damn it all, Anna, you behave as if you don't trust a man! Your hesitation is insulting. Sometimes I think you insult me maliciously, though God knows why. Now, see here! I want to serve you. I want you to have your way; to succeed. When you've seen just what success is worth to a woman, then you shall listen to me again. That's all I ask. Now, let me take a concert hall for you. All arrangements shall be thoroughly carried out. Give yourself a chance. Let me give you a chance, Anna!"

"It would cost five hundred pounds," said Anna in a slow voice.

"What's five hundred pounds?"

"More than ten times all the capital I've saved in eight years of work, Silver."

"Therefore, Anna let me——"

Anna murmured presently, "As a loan, payable with interest——"

Silver fell into sulks. He was dark and glooming. Suddenly in the midst of his sullen silence he became aware, somehow, that her mood was a soft, a chastened one. He did not know that it was due to Lucia's tears; but as soon as he sensed it his darkness magically lifted. And a little memory came into his mind, whereby he might touch her. He possessed himself of her hand.

"Do you know, child, that two months to-day is my birthday?"

She made a kind sound of interest.

"My birthday, and I'm the loneliest man alive, I believe; not a soul belonging to me. No, not one! Not a man or a woman to wish me luck or send me a ha'penny token. I'd like to give myself a present on my birthday, though, Anna. I'd like to give myself that concert. Now, think of it that way. For my birthday!"

He had her that time. She was a woman to whom

feast days were feast days, not to be cruelly disregarded. Like all women, towards birthdays she was ever young.

She cried with a little reluctant laugh, "Oh, Silver!" Then, "Well, if I can't get five hundred pounds before then—if I can't get it in a fortnight's time, because a concert isn't a thing to be arranged in a moment—I promise I will accept your wonderful offer."

But how her heart misgave her when she thus conditionally surrendered!

Silver smiled.

"A fortnight from to-day, then I will book you the best concert hall in London that I can get at six weeks' notice."

She was committed.

Day by day Anna was learning more and more surely that it is not easy to stand incorrupt; to keep the faith. The thin edge of that wedge of softness, luxury, lovely ease, was always feeling for a joint in her armour. Day by day she wanted more to believe her one or two counsellors who told her she was too radical, too hard, too immobile altogether for the swift fluencies and compromises of daily life. She wanted to believe them; but she still insisted on believing herself.

Yet, after Silver had dropped her at her rooms—the same rooms; she had clung to her first home like any grandmother wedded to a roof that saw her as a bride—she hugged the thought of that concert to her. As she climbed the narrow stairs—which were carpeted now at her expense, and to the dreary landlady's joy and pride; and above which the gas was now always alight for her return, at whatever hour—she couldn't help envisaging to herself the coveted scene: The big hall packed with people, many of them already friends and patrons; the empty platform, for her; the shining piano, for her; herself in a new gown, singing passionately and with a tremulous heart, for further glories. Would all this be less sweet if Silver Garnet provided the means? Would she feel,

in any way whatever, however impalpably, his shackle on her wrist ?

She knew she would. She was not of the type of woman to take much and give nothing. Rather would she never take if she could not also give. In her inner heart she knew that her murmur of loans, payable with interest, meant nothing. It never could mean anything to a man like Silver. What he wanted was to buy—no money returned. Anna went into her sitting-room, sat down and thought.

The room was now growing attractive, dainty. It had fresh paint, new chintz ; the bookcase was filling as weekly she bought herself some volume which she had long coveted. She clung to all these dear things most precariously, and knew it. The three months' contract with Ferrugi was almost worked out. Nothing bigger had yet transpired. Ferrugi would renew. . . . Would he renew ?

Yes ; she knew he would renew. She would earn six guineas a week ; sometimes a guinea or two from some society woman who engaged her services for an at home. But all was as yet fragile, precarious.

Then she went to bed, the affair unsolved, and lay awake and thought long—not of her own fortunes, but of a tall young man, very black and white across the vast distance of a rosy room, who had stood and looked across that space right into her eyes. She could feel his gaze still. He was so humble, so quiet, so proud, watching her whom he loved flying far from him. Her heart had ached. It ached now.

She stretched out her arms into the dark and said aloud, " Catch up with me, King ! Oh, catch up with me ! I dare not wait for you. But, oh, I want you to win ! "

When she fell asleep she was crying.

XIV.

The next day King Garnet stood in his atrocious room, making himself presentable for Anna Land. This making himself presentable was not the easy matter-of-course business it had been three months ago. He had one suit—besides his evening clothes, which some provident instinct had bidden him keep, and which had served him to obtain his job at the Charlton. He had one hat, one pair of gloves, one pair of boots and, now, no overcoat. His shirts were all right, but his laundry was bad. He was not yet up to the tricks by which a very poor man turns an immaculate front—to any but close observers—to the world. He had, however, retained his trousers press, and in that kind of house the domestic iron could be borrowed with ease. Kneeling on the floor, he had pressed his coat and waistcoat, and improved them, however amateurishly. He had never dressed for a smart dinner in his old world with half the anxious care and thought with which he now dressed for this red-letter afternoon in his new world.

And it was a fine afternoon, soft and full of promise, the tricky promise of spring, to be fulfilled by summer, then broken heartlessly by winter. People were happy; women idled about and looked into shop windows; the sun shone. In Piccadilly Circus he stopped and bought a bunch of violets for Anna. He stopped with his old air of smiling negligence to wish the flower-seller good-day, and thrust his hand into his pocket in the careless way to which she was accustomed in young men of his appearance, so that she thought he was going to buy a large bouquet and hastily began to mass the little bunches together for him. But he pulled out a sixpence, took one tiny cluster from her astonished hand and passed on.

"Damn!" he said to himself.

These were the little things that made him wince.

There was no adventure in them, like the bigger things of hunger and thirst and struggle.

Humbly he came to Anna; up the well-remembered stair, tapping at the door, then suddenly seeing her in a mist before him. It cut at his heart in a queer way. Just so had other things begun to cut at him, but this was worst of all. Then, as he stood just inside the room, with his back against the door, smiling hardily—if he had only known it—he felt Anna's fingers curl round his. Her cool, steady fingers seemed to pull him again right into the middle of a life that was worth while living.

Led like a child, without saying a word, he followed her to the hearth. She had a little fire, though the day was so warm that beyond the muslin curtains the windows were opened wide.

The memory of that kiss was with them both, and a brief silence like a spell dropped on them, broken first by her opening with, "Now sit there, in the old chair—everything's the same, you see—and tell me all you are doing."

"You know that, Anna," said King, sitting down at her bidding.

She took up her favourite position, half kneeling, half sitting on the rug. The same Anna! The difference between them lay in himself.

He looked around at the flowers in the room with a smile. He had laid his own bunch of violets beside his hat and stick on the table. Following his eyes, she reached up and took them and pinned them at her breast. He had an exquisite sensation of joy.

"How did you come to the Charlton?" she asked slowly.

He told her.

"So," she mused, "it was not because of me?"

"No, Anna. Because of you I nearly resisted going for the job."

"And, King, tell me your news. Your mother?"

He told her.

"I heard she'd gone, King. So you're alone?"

"Absolutely."

"Well?"

"Well, Anna?"

"You've more to tell me than that. How's life?"

"You have seen how it is."

"No, King. No, my dear. That isn't quite how I mean. I see you are in low waters for the moment. What of it? Tell me, what do you think of life now? Aren't your discoveries pretty wonderful?"

He stared at her thoughtfully; and quite suddenly he saw that his discoveries had been very wonderful indeed, already, but that he had gone only a little way yet into the new land.

"Yes, Anna. Everything has a meaning and an importance."

"Tell me more."

"There's so much that I don't know how to sort it out to tell you. I'm in a beastly house full of squalid rooms let just to anybody who can pay for 'em. One week my landlady let my rent run on till the next time, because it was cold weather, and I was looking after a job then that I had to wear a decent overcoat for. I told her and she let the money stand. Now I found out afterwards, Anna, that that woman pawned her silver teapot to tide her over the week when I didn't want to pay. I lost the job, popped my overcoat and got her teapot out. Now, a while ago, if I'd read that in a newspaper paragraph I'd have thought nothing of it; I wouldn't have understood it as anything but trivial. But now I know! I've been in it.

"It's a queer house. The woman opposite on my landing lends me her iron. . . . When I first went there I gave a navvy fellow who rooms in the basement a handful of my cigarettes for helping to carry my bag up. I hadn't got over my indolence, you see; it seemed natural to have

a working man doing the chores. Yesterday he passed me half his baccy as he went out. 'You try a pipe, young feller,' he said. I got a clay in the afternoon."

He took it out of his pocket and looked whimsically from it to Anna. She took the stained clay pipe in her hands.

"Give me your tobacco." She filled the pipe with the rank tobacco, handed it back and struck a match for him.

"Anna, you won't like this stuff I'm smoking in your nice room!"

"Nonsense! Light up!" He obeyed.

"I wish I'd been a pipe smoker before."

"There are lots more good things to learn yet, no doubt, King. We have a lifetime before us, you and I."

She laid a hand on his knee.

"The way you say that, Anna, makes me tremendously happy."

"I don't mean it that way, King—not yet."

"I have to win out?"

"I too; you in your way, I in mine. Then, if you still think I'm the woman for you, if I can feel you're the man for me—then, perhaps——"

Anna got up from the rug and made tea. He knelt down and toasted bread. They had tea together and talked much, before he asked:

"And now, Anna, tell me of you. All this while you've asked about me, the mess I'm making of affairs, the futile struggle I'm putting up. But about you there are far more glorious things to hear. Let's hear them."

He questioned so eagerly that by and by she told him, reluctantly at first, because of his misfortunes, but forgetting those for a while in the glow of his ardent interest. The half jealousy of his questions, the wistfulness, the fear, were lost upon her. She heard his "Oh, Anna, that's magnificent!" His "You darling girl, you'll win!" His "I want more than anything else in the world for you to succeed gloriously!" His "You'll just climb up—up—

up, Anna. I see you, I know ! " And so presently she told him of Silver and the birthday promise she had made him.

No longer were Garnet's jealousy and fear concealed. He suddenly cried out, " Silver ! Silver's going to finance you to success ? Oh, no, my dear ! Oh, no ! " He took her by the shoulders. He flamed. " You'll never take a farthing from that cad ! You couldn't, Anna. It's your principle not to be helped, not to take alms. You're never going to lower that principle for Silver ! "

Anna awoke from the dream in which she had been speaking so rashly, right out of the recesses of her heart, to realise King Garnet's hot eyes, his jealousy and despair, his nearly brutal clasp upon her shoulders. The anger she understood, but his reasoning was no reasoning at all in the light of his own past reproaches.

She cried resentfully, " Why, King ! You yourself wished to do that very thing for me not so long ago ! "

" Yes, Anna ! And you yourself refused it ! "

" I was so much poorer then ; I was quite, quite helpless as far as money goes. There isn't now the risk there was then if any friend——"

" Friend ! You call my worst enemy your friend ! "

" If any acquaintance or well-wisher, King, likes to back me, I should regard it as a loan."

" Would he regard it as a loan ? "

" If I said so," she replied spiritedly.

" You know that he would not ! He is not your friend at all ! "

" Won't you open your eyes and see, King, that he's only doing what you yourself would do in his place ? "

" Oh, don't remind me of places, girl ! He's got mine, but I haven't got his."

" You had it for a long while though."

" You say that ! " cried King, releasing her shoulders, which ached from the weight and frenzy of his gripping hands. " You say it ! "

"King, it is the truth."

"You are going to marry him perhaps," said the young man hoarsely.

"I am not going to marry him."

"You're fighting on his side though. You hold him up to me as a man in the right, while I am to be blamed for all I've done and left undone."

"I do nothing of the kind. I just—see clearly."

He turned away.

"Perhaps you do," he groaned. "But I—I can't see clearly. How can you ask me to see clearly where you are concerned? I just love you; I'm burned up for you; and I'm down and out, lower than I ever thought I could go, but not so low as I shall go, no doubt. You're flying far above me now. I've got to look up and see you out of reach. And you—you're going over to my worst enemy."

"Believe me that you're distorting everything, misunderstanding everything."

"A man does not misunderstand men."

"In a fortnight's time, if no other way arises, I am going to take five hundred pounds from your half-brother, as a loan, repayable with interest."

"Your mind is made up, Anna?"

She paused to consider the form of her answer, and to make it very gently. She looked at him, and knew him distraught. But she steeled herself and thought, "He has not the right. He has not the right," over and over again. She stretched out her hand to him, hesitating. He took it and kissed it and held it against his breast, and for a while they stood looking sombrely into each other's eyes.

At last she said, "King, you have not the right."

"I love you. Don't you even begin to love me?"

"I love and adore the man I want you to be."

"I will be that man, Anna, I promise you." Then he broke and said savagely, "Darned if I ever see how!

Darned if I ever see a way out of this ! Oh, Anna, Anna," he besought, " if we were only married ! If I could have you to come home to, you to talk to, you to advise me, you to keep me in heart——"

" You shall never lean on me, King, till you've leaned on yourself."

" Isn't it a woman's part, after all, to sustain a man, and comfort him, and——"

" Sustain ? That word for centuries has been too easy for one half the world and too hard for the other half."

" There is something cruel in you, Anna."

" Oh," whispered Anna, " I long for truth, and truth is cruel."

He turned away from her again, went to the table and fumbled for his hat and stick. His eyes were blind with tears of which he was truly ashamed. He did not know that, though she did not see, she guessed them and was wild to take him in her arms and comfort and sustain him, and let him lean on her all he liked. Only, she knew how she would have despised him afterwards ; a man who, after all, had only to meet the same battle that she had met and was still fighting. He came to her again, quite steady.

" I have no right to question you ; no right to ask or demand. What you decide to do, Anna, you will do. But I am a man, and I want to kill Silver. I could kill him with my bare hands, as you know."

Her eyes dilated. She kept down the little thrill of elemental rapture in her heart. She murmured, " It will be all right, King. I shall take the five hundred pounds in a fortnight's time. But it will make no difference. If I fail or succeed, it will be the same ; the same Anna. And for many years I shall be waiting, if necessary, just the same."

Garnet replied, " I may fail you. I have promised to be a big man for you ; but I may fail you. I am a waiter, and a most unaccomplished one at that."

"But you're hearing, seeing, believing, learning—all sorts of things you didn't know existed before."

"They show me that I may fail. You say, 'Look clearly.' When I look clearly I see that I may fail."

"And if you don't look clearly you can never win."

"Very well, my dear. I have been very happy this afternoon and I thank you for it. And I have been very wretched. But I thank you for everything; even for that too. Anna, a fortnight, isn't it?"

"A fortnight?"

"Before Silver buys whatever he may buy with his cursed five hundred pounds?"

She shrank, but replied hurriedly, "I have told him I shall wait a fortnight."

There was a great storm within him, and then a great calm as he said "Good-bye."

He went to the door without even a hand-clasp, leaving her on the hearth, looking after him. If he had known how she almost ran after him, pulled him back, kissed him, cried on his shoulder, it might have made no difference to his going, in the sudden mood which had fallen upon him. He had as he walked to the door, as by a miracle, the exaltation which sometimes comes to a man at the end of everything, when he means to forge ahead for death or glory, and really does not take much account, in the fighting, of which comes to him.

He heard her suddenly cry behind him, for the first time losing her strength, "K-K-King, I'm not wrong, am I?"

He replied, "I never think you wrong, Anna, unless I'm crazy," and went out.

XV.

"FIVE hundred pounds!" said King Garnet to himself, at least five hundred times during the next two days and

nights. "And I haven't five hundred shillings! No, nor five hundred pence!"

He walked the streets, looking at men's faces—their prosperous, preoccupied faces; he looked up at big blocks of offices where money was made as in a mint; he saw sleek men escorting soft women into theatre and dance club and jewellers; he waited, napkin over arm, daily, upon his more fortunate fellows; he went in the April gloaming through the vast green spaces of Hyde Park and saw the outcasts creeping away to shelter for the night.

He thought, "I understand the thief and the rogue, the mutineer and the parasite. I understand the murderer and the suicide, and I know why men do anything for money."

He thought he understood more clearly than he did in fact. He had not yet reached bottom; only in the fury of his inexperience did he feel himself there, not having tasted the deep sour waters in the bed of the river of utter destitution.

He sat on his bed of nights and searched desperately for the means to five hundred pounds. He dreamed of it in his pocket, and awoke to find himself bankrupt.

He found himself loitering sometimes outside a lighted jeweller's window. Here diamonds blinked; and pearls of such sheer beauty as made a vagrant's mouth water gleamed on black velvet beds. Now he knew how the beggar feels, watching the vast spectacle of riches; now he knew envy, greed and hate; now he saw the classes as dogs at each other's throats. Now he learned more wisdom hourly about his former blindness. Over the eyes of the rich man there is a lustrous film. His feet can never fit into the other fellows cracked shoes. He does not know.

"But I know!" thought Garnet. "I know now!"

He lingered covetously; but behind all those precious windows, at all hours of the night, was a watchman. Outside them, police patrolled.

"Damnation!" Garnet swore. "The laws are made against men like me!"

He felt weak. He felt the great hand of the rich world strongly protecting itself from him.

He made up his mind.

It was on the fourth day after he had last talked to Anna Land that, when he left the Charlton at 3.30 in the afternoon, he went towards his old home. He crossed Piccadilly, took the well-known ways through the quiet and pleasant by-streets, where the most vulgar traffic never trespassed, towards the Garnet House.

There was a fact which always struck him as strange about all his peregrinations on foot, shabby and daily more down at heel. It was this: That, whereas in old times, when a man had made his morning toilet and sauntered up Piccadilly towards the Ritz and lunch, he met a score of acquaintances who hailed him courteously and gladly, he now met none. As by a miracle a man became submerged. He could be lost in his own London and no one would even find him.

It was strange; it was bitter; it made him laugh. So, as he went, a stranger in a strange city, to his half-brother's house, he met no one who knew him, or who would have recognised him, anyway.

He meant to ask Silver point-blank for that money, as a loan. He had swallowed his rage and his pride, and he meant to stand before his brother, hat in hand. It appealed a little, too, to his sense of a joke that Silver might lend the very money that should free Anna from any impending obligation to him.

He reached the well-known front door, rang the bell and looked about him. Workmen were busy like flies on the front of the house. It was assuming a dazzling white. Gardeners were attending window boxes. Silver had that usual affectation of the human mushroom; he must paint the lily.

A new butler opened the front door, and looked the shabby young man up and down. Mr. Silver Garnet was out, and the servant professed himself entirely unprepared to say when he would be in.

"The business is extremely important." said King Garnet, looking beyond the butler into the familiar hall.

"Your name?"

Just as his name was on the tip of his tongue King Garnet remembered that the house was probably forbidden to him, and that the servants would have had their orders thereon.

He replied, "Johnson."

"You might see Mr. Garnet's secretary, perhaps, if your business is really urgent," said the butler, and he motioned the young man in.

Within that spacious hall, then, still furnished in the ebony woods, hung with the thick dim reds and blues chosen by his mother, King Garnet waited. But in two minutes he was ushered into the library, into the presence of Paul Bobby.

King Garnet saw this slight, pale, dapper, inscrutable youth with amazement and amusement. Bobby was exquisite; oiled, manicured, tailored, barbered to a hair; and his sloe-black eyes were the coldest things into which King Garnet had ever looked.

The young secretary made a small suave movement of the hand, and spoke insolently:

"Sit down."

Garnet sat down on the farther side of the big central writing table, and Bobby straddled on the hearth before a wood fire and surveyed him.

"Your name is Johnson? Your business?"

"My business is of a very private nature with Mr. Silver Garnet."

The secretary smiled very slightly.

"Really, Mr. Johnson? You had better tell it to me."

"I must repeat that it is private."

"A rich man has no private business," Bobby remarked; 'or none which is kept from the ear of a confidential secretary. Are you a commercial traveller, an insurance agent, or"—his eyes travelled blankly up and down the visitor—"an applicant of some sort?"

For a short space of time King Garnet kept silent, cogitating his reply, and wondering about his exact footing in this house. In that silence Paul Bobby came to his conclusion. He had noticed the visitor's linen.

"You've come to beg, eh?"

Garnet threw off all prevarications.

"That's exactly my errand."

Bobby paused and looked towards the door. He had to a fine degree the art of implication by his least glance or gesture. His look was a condemnation, a refusal and an eviction all at once. And Garnet longed to take the soft, implacable boy and throw him from the house as, not so very long ago, he had thrown Silver.

"I want five hundred pounds," he said calmly.

Bobby laughed. King Garnet sat by while the exquisite youth sauntered to the window and back, contemptuously laughing; and his anger suddenly evaporated, leaving him with a great and desperate calm. He watched Paul Bobby's loitering progress forth and back.

The secretary stood again on the hearth rug, his hands thrust negligently into his trousers pockets.

"Is that all?" said he.

"That is absolutely all," said King Garnet, but with a metal ring in his lowered voice.

Bobby had raised an eyebrow again at the door, but he readjusted it and regarded Garnet curiously.

"You mean?"

"I mean I want five hundred pounds."

Bobby paused.

"Your name is really Johnson?"

"It serves."

"Quite so," said Bobby. "Or rather it serves not at all, but will do as well as any other name as far as I am concerned. But let me know your meaning—if you have one. You are acquainted with Mr. Silver Garnet?"

"We have met occasionally."

"Come! Do you tell me that on the strength of an

occasional acquaintance you have come to ask for a sum like that ? "

" I have come to try."

" You imagine you have some kind of hold over Mr. Silver Garnet, I take it."

" On the contrary, no hold at all."

" Then, my poor fool," said Bobby, " you may walk out."

" No," said King Garnet, " I do not walk out."

Bobby looked intently from him to the bell, and back again. " There's something behind this. Come ! Let's get at it."

" There is nothing behind it but sheer, damn desperation."

The slim boy became suddenly alert. Into his cold black eyes came a little spark.

" Desperate, eh ? "

Garnet nodded.

" People use big words too easily," Bobby remarked, balancing on his heels.

" I have not used the word easily at all. Coming here begging makes me sick."

Bobby rocked very gently on his heels, looking him over.

" Why the exactitude of the sum ? Some scrape, eh ? "

" It is the minimum that I must have, within ten days from now."

" Why the exactitude of the date ? "

" That is my business."

Still Bobby regarded him with that spark of fire in his black eyes.

" When you say you are desperate, I believe you. You look desperate. But I don't think you will get five hundred pounds from Silver Garnet for no better reasons than the ones you put forth."

" You think not ? "

" I know it. But——"

" But ? " Garnet echoed.

Before he spoke again Bobby stood for some seconds silent on the hearth, listening for sounds about the house.

There were none. Thick built, heavily carpeted, it was quiet as a grave. All the while his busy eyes were on Garnet, sitting moveless before him.

At last he said, "I have been up against things myself before now. I have had to turn like a hare before the greyhounds. I know what it is. You are in that sort of tight place, eh?"

"I am in a tighter place," Garnet replied slowly.

A slight kindness and warmth, calculated to a shade, infused the secretary's voice. Without moving, he made a friendlier impression of drawing nearer.

"But," he went on, "there are often things a man can do."

"Name 'em," said Garnet bitterly.

"Sometimes," Bobby pursued, "they are things which can only be named in strictest confidence. A man who can hold his tongue, keep his wits and show a bit of enterprise and pluck can now and again pick up a sum even as high as five hundred pounds."

Garnet sprang up.

"Name 'em, I tell you!"

Bobby laughed and dropped back into his easy air of sleek detachment. But his eyes remained lively on the other.

"It's not so rashly done," he answered.

"Look here," said Garnet, "what you're hinting at I have no means of guessing. But say it right out. I swear to you that I'm in such straits that I'd take on any old damn thing to get hold of the money. Look at me and believe it!"

"I have looked at you," said Bobby, "and I believe it. It is just possible that I might put you in the way of earning—say, three hundred pounds within the next ten days."

"Five hundred!"

"Come!" said Bobby. "Nonsense!"

"Five hundred!" said Garnet huskily.

"Three would serve your purpose."

"Three would not."

Bobby hesitated, and at last said, "You have your definite reasons for making your price. Very well. The job I am thinking of, should it mature, would probably be worth that price. Tell me where and when you may be found, and I'll see."

Garnet walked, fairly gasping, to the desk, and wrote his address.

"After 10.30 at night; before 11.30 in the mornings," he stammered.

Bobby took the paper from the desk and slipped it into a pocket. He nodded.

"When will you let me know more?" Garnet demanded.

"Any time," Bobby replied, "if at all."

Garnet moved closer to the assured youth and stared him full in the eyes. Bobby did not flicker, nor did his gaze fall. He had the consummate art of the cheat, of looking everyone unabashed in the face.

But the dark hint of the slow smile that twitched his mouth got through to Garnet's bewildered senses.

"This is a dirty game?" he said fiercely.

"I have specified no game," said Bobby coldly.

"But whatever it is," King added, "I'll play it if you give me the chance."

"It's not so dirty," said Bobby, "as dangerous."

"I'll play."

"There is one thing," said Bobby, "that I'd like to know: Is this money for your own enjoyment?"

"No," said Garnet brusquely.

"For a woman then?"

Garnet replied, after angry hesitation, "Yes."

Bobby's face lightened and his cynical smile mellowed.

"I guess you're all right then," he said. "You'd go the limit."

"I'd go to hell!"

"I know," said Bobby. "Some fellows would. I'm

not like that myself. I use women; they don't use me. By the way, you've seen better days?"

That time Garnet laughed.

"I thought so," said Bobby.

Then he returned to the subject of Silver.

"You tell me you've no special knowledge of Silver Garnet, eh?"

"None," said King. "Why?"

"I like to know fellows I'm working for inside and out," Bobby replied.

King Garnet's easy-going wits had been sharpened by adversity and by queer house fellows, so he gathered Bobby's drift.

"Useful," he said, "eh?"

"I have found it so in my time," Bobby replied with his darkish smile.

"You're a dirty dog if ever there was one," King Garnet thought; and for a moment he felt almost compassion for Silver, who was doubtless walking into Bobby's toils as a big bottle fly blunders into the deadly web of the lustful spider.

But Bobby was speaking again, airily: "You know Silver Garnet's chucking up the printing, perhaps?"

"No!"

"Yes. The works were sold to-day, and the good-will, and so on, of course. Silver Garnet's out for thrills."

"Thrills, eh?"

"They're all alike, these fools who get a fortune dropped on 'em," said Bobby. "They get drunk with life, and so full of glamour that they can't see anything under their noses. Silver Garnet's sick of the works. He wants his money to play with, and you'll see he'll be the prey of every dud-company promoter in the city. The poor fool will bathe in what he thinks the waters of life, and the sharks'll get him."

"I'll bet they will," said King Garnet, and for the life

of him he could not help looking very rudely at Paul Bobby; but the youth minded not at all.

"He's speculating already," said he. "And his latest idea is a big film deal. He fancies himself as a financier and a patron of the arts."

"And if he gets the fall you say he's riding for," said King, "what'll you do?"

"Be ready for it," said Bobby. "No doubt I shall be through with him by then. Even at his pace he should last quite a bit yet."

He looked quite smooth and placid as he stood there balancing on his heels before Silver's comfortable library, discussing with amusement Silver's probable downfall. King Garnet scorned him none the less vigorously because he scorned silently.

"Well, clear off," said Paul Bobby. "You may hear from me at any time, and you may not."

King Garnet cleared off—and out of that house without the utterance of another word.

Bobby was still lounging in the library when Silver came in.

Silver these days was fatter, sleeker, infinitely triumphant. He felt as if he had the earth by the throat and could shake it like a rat any time he pleased. He had three hundred thousand pounds of capital, a fine house, two cars, an urbane young secretary gifted highly in the sycophantic arts, and he felt big. He threw himself into an easy-chair.

"Anyone telephoned?"

"No, sir," said Paul Bobby.

"Anyone called?"

"No, sir," said Paul Bobby.

"We'll have tea, eh?"

Paul Bobby rang the bell. Pending the arrival of tea, Silver began to talk:

"I say, Bobby, my mind's made up. I'm going to buy the two Atholl picture houses. I'm going to rent

those two big newAmerican films that Ogilvey's have made. I'm going to butt into this industry and show them how. It's a great industry, Bobby; still cramped. I've got some big ideas that will astonish a few of these fellows, I think. I was talking to a young inventor to-day who has worked out an entirely new system of automatic change-over and projector control. Costs less and is streets ahead of anything used so far. I shall probably buy his patent. I shall probably——"

"Where did you meet him?" asked Bobby.

"Waiting-room of the Ogilvey people."

"You would," said Paul Bobby carelessly.

He had scant respect for Silver.

"What d'you mean?" Silver demanded.

"Only that, sir," Bobby responded in his most courteous voice, "he was possibly hanging about to try to get through to Ogilvey."

"He was, but I headed him off. I said: 'Look here, young man, my name's Silver Garnet. You've possibly heard of me.' He said he had." Bobby concealed a smile behind the hand with which he stroked his shaven upper lip. "'Hold tight,' I said, 'and let me hear of you again in a couple of day's time. You may find it distinctly worth your while.' He struck me as a keen man, very keen."

"I'll bet he is," said Bobby. "And so your mind's made up? You're buying the houses. Any idea of price?"

"I shall go up to one hundred and fifty thousand pounds for the two."

"I hear Ogilvey's are on the point of buying 'em," Bobby remarked.

Silver's smile was infinitely crafty.

"So I hear too. But I think my bid will be considerably over theirs. To-morrow I'm talking it over with this young inventor fellow, who seems pretty shrewd, Bobby—and then I'll buy."

"I have found out for you, sir, that Ogilvey's are calling a special board meeting to discuss the business the day after to-morrow."

"They'll be too late!" said Silver importantly.

"Seen Atholl's at all, sir?"

"Not me," said Silver. "I know a thing or two, my boy. Don't forget that. And I'm not creating any competition. I shall go in quietly when I'm ready, make my deal quietly and slide into the business before the rest of the trade knows there's a newcomer among 'em. That's my way, Bobby. A lot of talk and chattering and advertisement, and what happens? Whole horde o' riffraff round one, touting for any kind of picking. Yes, I may be judged that kind of fool. I may be, not that I give much chance for it; but if so, I'm judged wrong. Eh?"

"I should say so," Bobby replied with admirable gravity.

"The thunderclap method, the lightning method—that's me," said Silver. "And here's tea. Pour it out."

His eyes fell on the silver equipage on the vast silver tray.

"Bought Queen Anne tea service to-day," he said; "paid a hundred guineas for it. Beautiful thing. Bought Wedgwood dessert service too. Paid seventy-five guineas. Well, I fancied it—all real old stuff."

"If you don't even begin to think of taking care of your money——" Bobby was commencing, when he stopped. After all, the man would last him out. And fools would part with their money, anyway, anyhow, any time. Saving fools was a fool's job.

"Sure of the stuff?" he asked.

"Sure?" Silver repeated. "Sure? I should say so? I know a little about a sight more things than just printing, though you mayn't think it."

Again Bobby did not trouble to reply, as he might have replied, "Yes; but I could have picked up the Queen Anne service for you for half the money; and the Wedg-

wood stuff too." It was of no interest to him to destroy in any way Silver's self-satisfaction.

"When I fancy a thing I have it," said Silver.

Bobby poured tea daintily as a woman. He sugared, creamed and handed Silver his cup. His brain was busy.

"There are two or three things I think of going into," said Silver confidentially. "The printing works was all right. Nice source of income for an old lady; steady, safe. But for a man with brain and imagination—a man who dares to follow his own ideas and inspirations—there's a bigger game to be played with his money than that. What do you bet me I don't end by becoming a millionaire?"

Bobby listened respectfully, with appropriate sounds.

"Multimillionaire, rather," added Silver, stretching his legs.

He threw back his head against his chair, fixed his eyes on the shadowed ceiling over which the firelight danced, and dreamed riotously. Bobby watched him.

"So you haven't approached Atholl's in any way, Mr. Garnet?"

"Not I. They'd only play me against Ogilvey's, and Ogilvey's against me. I shall walk in, make my offer, tell 'em it's then or never, and unless they've other bidders, which they haven't, they'll close on the spot."

"No; they've no other bidders," said Bobby.

"What do you know about it?" Silver demanded.

Bobby gestured.

"Well, in a sense I'm in the middle of that sort of thing, aren't I? One hears rumours and sorts 'em out."

"Precisely," said Silver, "one does. I do. I've got intuition. I know one rumour from t'other almost by smell. Yes. . . . How's Mrs. Aveline?"

"I lunched with her to-day. She talked of you."

"Of me, eh?" smiled Silver.

Bobby nodded.

"She's got a tremendous admiration for you."

"One of these weak, trustful little women," said Silver; "dear little thing. Fascinating. Must see her again soon. Send her some flowers."

"Flowers? Now?"

"Ah, go and ring up my florist and tell 'em to send six dozen roses along right away. Or send a servant; someone'll have to take my card. My card must go in."

Bobby put down his cup and left the room.

He accomplished the errand, save for the inclosure of Silver's card. He substituted his own. The flowers cost him nothing; and Lucia's pleasure would be infinitely greater.

Silver stretched his legs and leaned back and thought of Anna. In ten day's time now he would be booking that concert for her; starting her real career; her press agent should be all right; she should see how a man of his calibre could just lay all the things she wanted so easily at her feet. She should see—and succumb.

"Won't be long now," Silver thought.

Bobby returned. He had Silver's engagement book in his hand.

"I must remind you that you're engaged to-night, Mr. Garnet. Dinner at 8.30 at the Senior Charlton Club with Lord Ivinghoe."

"Oh, ah! Old Ivinghoe," said Silver, affecting a yawn of nonchalance. "Nice old fellow," he added. "Shall ask him to put me up for that club."

"I'm afraid even Lord Ivinghoe can't do that."

"Eh?" said Silver disbelievingly.

"You wouldn't get in during your lifetime," Bobby explained. "The membership list is closed just now, and the waiting list is pretty long."

"Confounded silly system these high-class clubs are run on," Silver complained.

Paul Bobby sympathetically agreed.

"I'm thinking of making old Ivinghoe one of my directors when I start my film company," said Silver with

incredible importance. "We're to talk it over to-night. Wants five hundred guineas a year though, in fee."

"Half these old families are very poor," said Bobby gravely. "They can turn an easy penny by hiring out their names, and they do it. It's the only thing they can do."

"Aha!" said Silver. "Well, I don't grudge the old feller the money."

"He'll give you a good dinner for it," Bobby remarked, "and introduce you to his pals, most of whom would be charmed to do the same."

"Aha!" said Silver obliviously. "So the world goes."

"As you won't be wanting me this evening," Bobby added, "I've made an engagement outside, after dinner."

"Certainly, certainly," said the bland Silver.

Bobby left him to his castle building.

Silver Garnet sat beside the fire, legs stretched out, head back, eyes on the ceiling, a half smile on his mouth, thinking and dreaming in very riots of thoughts and dreams, till he was heady with the brew of his own ecstasies; till the butler, who valeted him, came to say:

"Your clothes are laid out, sir; your bath is ready; and as Mr. Bobby tells me your engagement is for 8.30, may I suggest, sir, that it is time to dress?"

If anything could have roused Silver gratefully from such happy visions it was to be called for just such a rite as his evening toilet. His evening toilet still exalted him. He loved the ritual of the affair; he loved going from the warm room downstairs to the warm room upstairs; the attentions of the good servant; the perfectly pressed clothes laid out for him, with the choice always made unerringly by the butler-valet between dinner-jacket and tails. He loved his evening bath; he loved his pearl studs; he loved his newest things in patent leather shoes. He loved it all.

Paul Bobby sat in the dining-room below, waited upon by a footman, choosing Silver's food like a *gourmet;*

drinking like an epicure Silver's wines. He had never in his life had anything appreciable that was his by right; but all his life other people's property had seemed to him as good as his. He, too, loved it all. He took it.

XVI.

At 10.30 King Garnet had reached his room, lighted the gas jet and filled his pipe. All his senses were sharpened; his ears listened for a footfall; his eyes watched the door and barely wandered from it; he was quiet as the grave with expectancy. He sat there for fifteen minutes, when feet climbed the uncarpeted stairs; a knock fell on the door. He sprang up, called "Come in!" and Paul Bobby entered.

They looked at each other, and Bobby nodded. He closed the door very quietly. He had the knack—which at many times he had found useful in adventures both amorous and more material—of closing doors without a sound, of moving without stirring the air. He was resolute and furtive at the same time, and there was a light in his cold black eyes.

"Expect me?" he queried.

"Yes," King nodded.

"You have faith," said Bobby.

"No," said King; "a hunch; an inspiration."

"Inspiration is what you will need, my friend," said Bobby, and he peeled off his dress overcoat and tossed it with his silk muffler on the table, where his hat and cane already lay. He looked the room over thoroughly, and with a slight smile.

"You're not exactly doing yourself proud at the moment, eh?"

"As you see," King replied.

Bobby took the room's one chair and opened his cigarette

case. King settled himself on the narrow bed close by. "Have a cigarette?" said Bobby, proffering his own.

For a short while after the cigarettes were lighted there was silence between the two young men. It was due not so much to hesitation as to deliberation on Bobby's part. He was again thinking his proposition over, and weighing up his man, while suspense numbed King's tongue. Quite suddenly Bobby got to work.

"Look here, you, Johnson. I suppose that's not your name, but, as you remarked, it will serve as well as any other. Answer my questions again. You have no down on Silver Garnet?"

"No," said King.

"Nor any hold on him of any kind?"

"No."

"And you're right up in a tight place for five hundred pounds."

"I am."

"You'd do anything short of murder and arson to get it?"

"I would."

"Tried any particular way?"

"I've got no further than looking around jewellers' windows."

"Ah," said Bobby with an air of satisfaction, "but you'd definitely got as far as that, had you?"

"I had."

"Ever—er—done anything of that kind? In your line at all?"

That made King laugh, and his laughter caused his mere shake of the head to convince Bobby.

"Well," he said, "you're desperate. I've a ticklish job I want done quickly and quietly and without any bungling. A skilled criminal is not really what I want; some daredevil practical joker would really fill the part better. The risks are yours entirely. If you fail and get nabbed I disown any connection with you, except I shall speak to

having had you cadging round for money. You've got to shoulder the risks and let me and my partner go safe. You understand ?

" The pay's high—five hundred pounds—and the work will take twenty-four hours at the outside."

" I'm on it."

" Know Silver Garnet by sight ? "

King claimed this knowledge casually.

" Now look here ! " said Bobby, his quiet voice growing somewhat staccato and his eyes brighter. " Silver Garnet has to be kidnapped and lost as soon after dark to-morrow as it can happen."

" You ask me to kidnap Silver Garnet ? "

" It is the job I offer you."

" There's some kick to a job like that," King mused, and his heart felt lighter and more laughing than it had for three months.

" Like it ? " said Bobby.

" It makes me laugh."

" M-m ! Understand, you take all the risks. We disappear from the game entirely."

" We ? Who's your pal ? "

" I can tell you enough to satisfy your curiosity," said Bobby ; " but I don't propose to tell you more. There's no purpose in it, and the less you know the better. There's a certain important deal which I want a certain friend of mine—or rather, a man who will become a friend of mine if I help him to what he wants—to pull off at his own figure ; the figure he's prepared to offer as a piece of sound business. Any much higher figure would be preposterous. But Silver Garnet is preposterous. He's going butting in with some fancy offer that no sane man would compete with. Out of his sheer, silly ignorance and conceit he does it, but it will bust the other fellow's scheme just the same. Do I explain clearly, or do I not ? You see, there will be two offers for this concern, and one will be Silver Garnet's, who will outbid any reasonable figure the other fellow offers.

Get Silver out of the way, and the only offer going—which is a pretty fair one on the whole—will be taken. You get my meaning ? "

" Absolutely ! "

" Silver Garnet's like a mad bull among china at the present moment ; rushes at everything ; sees himself as a big speculator, a mighty company promoter, great film magnate or anything else that takes his fancy. Only idea that never occurs to him is that he'll inevitably come out on the wrong side of everything. His ignorance is so colossal that he takes himself for a clever man."

" What's this particular business, then ? "

" Films," said Bobby after a momentary hesitation. " No doubt you want to know a little about what you're asked to do. That's all right. I'll tell you something willingly. The immediate negotiations are for the sale of two picture-houses—big uns. I've told the managing director of the company concerned in purchasing them that I think I can work Silver Garnet."

" Where do you come in ? "

" I shall ask for a five-year contract at my own figure and get back into the work I love doing."

" Silver Garnet would give you a contract."

" That fool ? He'd be broke in twelve months if he ever started on the game. He has money, but not enough. That's Silver all over. He can't imagine Crœsus with a fuller purse than he himself's got. Yes, he'd break himself within twelve months. Why, we're doing the poor mutt a service if we keep him out—not that kidnapping is exactly a lawful action, I'm afraid."

" Lawful be hanged ! If that's all you want, I'll do it ! "

" And all the penalties—if any—are yours, mind. Any exposure, and I disown you."

" That's all right," cried King Garnet from a buoyant heart. " And now we come to my end of the stick. Where and how do you pay over my five hundred ? "

" I shall give you a post-dated cheque—post-dated by

exactly two days from now—on the Sub-International Bank in King William Street. If in the meanwhile Silver Garnet has made his deal and bought the picture-houses by any ways or means, you'll find that cheque stopped."

Adversity and its strange fellows had sharpened King Garnet's wits. His trusting good-nature was a thing of the past. He saw the shifts and dodges, the twists and turns made by men to make and keep money; he had begun to guess that some men would rob their mothers as gladly as they would loot a safe; or send the savings of ten thousand widows and orphans to glory, to bear a market with profit to themselves. And he knew that a man will promise to pay this or that for a service that may cost the servitor dear—and then sneak off, paying nothing. He had already seen taxi drivers tricked; and worthless signatures put to dinner bills; and those of little strength thrust aside conscienceless by those of greater.

He, therefore, leaned across the table to Paul Bobby and asked, "How do I know I won't find it stopped anyway, as soon as it's written? How do I know I won't do your job and find myself a fool for my pains?"

Bobby was in no way discomposed.

"I'm not surprised it occurs to you. You'll find the money all right, because we prefer your silence to your speech, discredited as that speech would be."

"All right," said Garnet. "But I tell you, if things are not O.K. two days from now when I walk into that bank with the cheque—why, I'll speak. Speak? I'll roar! And little as you think it, I'll be believed."

"Rot!" said Bobby. "We're not out to do you. You'll draw your money fair and square. But rot, about being believed! There is no mistaking a man on his uppers"—his practised eye ran over the other—"and that's what you're on. Your uppers, my good fellow! You're seedy; you come from nowhere, you're nobody. I don't advise you to shout."

"That's where you're wrong," King Garnet returned.

"I come from somewhere pretty definite, and Silver Garnet would believe me."

For a few moments Bobby stared curiously and uncertainly. Then he remarked:

"All right. No need for all this rough stuff. I'm offering you a high-priced job. You take it. That's all either side wants, I suppose. Let me show you that pretty picture you want to see."

He drew out a thin pocket-book of morocco, gold-mounted, and from its few papers selected a folded cheque. He spread it on the table.

"I brought it with me, you see,"—he indicated the signature—"he had an idea notes would be better. But I don't think it matters anyway; and I think you'd better not come calling round at all."

"I part from you to-night; you take what steps you choose; this can be cashed in two days; I don't set eyes on you again, or you on me. Understand?"

"I can't suppose we find any mutual pleasures in each other's society," King Garnet returned.

He took the cheque. It was fully made out, and signed "J. Ogilvey."

"Thanks," he said.

He put it away in an inner breast pocket. His head swam a little; his heart felt transcendently light and elated. There remained only achievement and that cheque would really be his—or rather Anna's. Bobby watched.

"How," he asked, with the first uneasiness he had shown, "do you propose to carry the thing out?"

"What are his movements to-morrow evening?"

"No engagements," said Bobby; "but I can arrange for him to dine at his club. I'll find a reason. That'll be easy. We can get him out."

"What's the size of his chauffeur?"

"Big soft chap," said Bobby.

"Silver hasn't changed his livery?"

"No, he only renewed it, spick and span. Can't help dropping money, Silver can't."

"Where's the old suit?"

"I suppose the fellow's got it, to sell, or do as he likes with."

"Is he sleeping in the house still?"

"Yes."

"Is he in to-night?"

"No; Silver's dining with Lord Ivinghoe. The car'll be fetching him soon."

King Garnet bounded to his feet.

"Give me a taxi fare."

Bobby's mouth folded tight.

"I didn't promise extras," said he, with eyes like gimlets.

"You silly fool, I've got to have my expenses! Give me a taxi fare. I haven't got five bob. Paid my overdue rent just before you came in. They caught me for it on my way upstairs. Come! Quick! Ten bob!"

With a hostile stare Bobby drew out a ten-shilling note and handed it over slowly.

"Don't you run up expenses," he threatened, "or——"

"Or?" King snarled, reaching for his hat.

"It ought to come off that cheque, dashed if it oughtn't!"

"You try it on!" King snorted, making for the door.

Bobby reached it, too, realizing that the business had begun.

"Here! You! Johnson! What are your plans?"

"Leave 'em to me! All you do is to see he goes out in his car to-morrow night, and then that the chauffeur gets down to deliver a note somewhere specified before Silver gets out."

Paul Bobby's mind ran like lightning along the track before it.

"He'll dine at his club. I'll fix up some guests there for him to-morrow morning. On the way he shall stop at the Senior Charlton to deliver a note or something or

other to Lord Ivinghoe. I'll see it's necessary to do it. Know the Senior Charlton? The chauffeur will have to go right inside to speak to the hall porter; I'll see he has something definitely to speak about, for Silver. Silver remains in the car."

"That's all I want. I'll be waiting near the Senior Charlton from 7.30 to-morrow evening."

"A moment, you, Johnson! You're not to kill him. Not to go in for anything messy."

"He shall be safe as a baby with its nurse."

Bobby laughed.

"Baby he is, and nice lot o' nurses he's got!"

"Say, though," King corrected, "instead of dining at his club, after stopping at the Senior Charlton, can't you arrange for him to dine out at Regent's Park, or Highgate, or somewhere like that? Maida Vale would do."

For a few seconds Bobby's mind ran on. Then: "I'll fix him a dinner party in Hampstead. Leave that sort of thing to me. To-morrow night he shall dine either with Sir Toby Framlingham or Julius Hepburn, the journalist, out there. Leave it to me! I can work on Silver's mind the way the wind bends reeds. . . . I say——"

But King Garnet had opened the door and was already halfway downstairs. While Bobby still stood there, listening, he heard the street door bang far below.

He put on his coat and muffler, dusted his hat and looked around the narrow room a moment or two before he went out. He had known it all by heart himself, before he learned the uses of rich women and vain men. He had not yet quite forgotten that one turned off the gas on every possible occasion. Mechanically he reached up and turned off King Garnet's flickering jet before he, too, went down into the street and made his way, by taxi-cab that Silver would pay for under the heading of General Secretarial Expenses, to the Legation Dance Club, where even now Lucia would be awaiting him, after her evening at a theatre. She would give him a perfect supper.

XVII.

Silver Garnet's chauffeur missed his cast-off suit of livery from the hook where it hung, pending a pretty good sale he had in mind; and he thought the other servants had played a joke on him, being in no wise impressed by their denials. The master of the house was dining out, the chauffeur had gone to fetch him home, the servants were all shut into the servants' hall, when King Garnet opened the front door noiselessly with his well-oiled latch-key—which had been on his key chain all these three months of exile—slipped quiet as a shadow up the stairs and down again, with the suit of livery over his arm.

Silver lay in bed late of mornings now. He was making up for the enforced good habits of a lifetime. He did not know that Bobby had been telephoning very early and very busily. Sir Toby was away, but Julius Hepburn was in, and Paul Bobby's agility of brain was entirely equal to the situation of his own devising.

"I say, Hepburn, this is Paul Bobby, whom you will hardly recall. . . . It's good of you to say you do, I'm sure. . . . By the way, I'm secretary to Silver Garnet just now. . . . I beg your pardon? . . . Yes, that's the man, no other. . . . Yes; yes, he has sold the works. Too dull, you know. . . . Ever met him? . . . I say, ever met him? . . . Well, that's just what I'm venturing to ring you up about. As a matter of fact, you did meet him, in a way, at one of Lucia Aveline's affairs, I think; though I suppose you didn't notice him. . . . Now, look here, Hepburn, are you doing anything to-night? If not, why not ask him to dinner quietly with you at home, eh? . . . Why ask him? Well, I'll tell you, old man. He's thinking of buying up *The Adventurer*, you know; that weekly thing you write your topping stuff for. . . . Yes. . . . Well, I did think you might

like to know. . . . Oh, don't thank me, old man. . . . And—are you there?—Garnet was asking me specially about you yesterday. . . . And if you rang up, reminded him you both dined at Lucia Aveline's—for I'm sure you have—and asked him to dinner to-night, I believe he'd come like a shot. Do you no harm either, if he's going to buy the paper. . . . No, no, don't thank me. I want to give Silver Garnet the pleasure of meeting you again, because I know he's keen to have it; only the pleasure would be greater if the invitation came spontaneously from you. He's the shyest man you ever—you'll ring him up? Do it in ten minutes. He'll be bucked no end. I say, don't say I let on about the sale. It's all in the air. . . . Thanks. . . . G'-by."

So Silver got into his car with a distinct feeling of gratification. A man—a Julius Hepburn—had rung him up. He had turned to Bobby to ask "Who's this?" Young Bobby had been warmly pleased.

"Why, Hepburn's one of our biggest journalists, sir! You met him at Lucia Aveline's. Probably thought him an insignificant chap and never noticed him. But he noticed you. Been talking about you ever since. Has he asked you to dinner, sir? I'd go, I would. It'd please him. He'd be bucked no end. And an invitation from Julius is quite a good thing too. Don't say I mentioned it, because of course it's his affair, not mine; but he's doing a book of big business careers—biographical. I suppose nobody can impart the touch of romance to a thing like that as Hepburn could do it. What I think is, he wants to get round you to be put in it. You see, your career's pretty remarkable; you're a very outstanding figure; and that's what I think. If that's what he's after I wouldn't refuse him. Really, I wouldn't."

"I'll see about that," said Silver with a swell at his heart that suffused his veins and made him heady. "Meanwhile, Bobby, call him up and say I'll be delighted to dine at 7.30 to-night."

Silver was heady again, then, when he got into his car to go to his new triumph. The day had been busy. The young inventor had lunched with him. He had made his decision unalterably about the purchase of the two Atholl picture houses. The greatest journalist in London wished to include him in his brilliant book of big business careers.

As he drove he was wondering about old Ivinghoe. He supposed he was worth a five-hundred-guinea fee as director of the Garnet Superfilm Company. Superfilm it would be called, for Garnet's whole mind was in a superlative attitude as regarded himself and his affairs. Old Ivinghoe had been awfully pleasant at dinner last night and had made some gratifying introductions as he ambled through his club, Silver Garnet quivering with exaltation at his side. Silver was glad Bobby had reminded him that Lord Ivinghoe had an interest in natural history, was a past hunter of big game and would be perfectly enthralled by that new book of Abbey's that Bobby had bought for the Garnet library that afternoon. It was a good idea to stop at Ivinghoe's club, according to Bobby's suggestion, and leave that book, with Silver's card, and "Have you seen this? Pretty fine!" scribbled on it.

"He'll be awfully touched and pleased," Bobby had said; "and, personality as he is, the old man's lonely. And he's taken an extraordinary liking to you. . . . Hasn't many intimate friends, Ivinghoe hasn't."

The car rolled smoothly up the Mall, turned and ran into St. James's. They drew up at the vast dark portals of Ivinghoe's club. The chauffeur alighted, came to the door for the book and went sedately up the steps of the club. He disappeared within the big swing door. Silver lay back, dreaming.

His chauffeur was quickly in the driving seat again, and they headed north-west.

The usual traffic blocks occurred as far as Regent's Park, but after that there was little private traffic on the roads. They ran on and on; came to Hampstead, the

chauffeur showing no lack of decision as to direction. Silver himself had no idea of where Julius Hepburn's house lay. But as the big car purred on melodiously, without a pause, he congratulated himself on the new chauffeur who knew his London really well.

"Every inch of it," Silver thought. "Yes; I can pick a man as well as most."

The wooded slopes on either side of the darkish road of the best residential Hampstead were practically unknown to Silver. But he was very comfortable. Bobby had mixed him, before going out, one of the finest cocktails he had ever tasted. In fact he had drunk two.

He was very sleepy, and between recurring blanks against which his mind struggled he registered the wish that he should be at his best this evening.

Two of those particular cocktails—seemed rather much—fine idea—book of big business careers——

Silver slept.

When Silver awoke the car still rushed through the dark. He had slept through the stop at an all-night garage for petrol; he had slept while King Garnet jammed the fastenings of the door. And when at length he awoke it was to darkness and complete silence, save for the even rush of the car. He leaned back awhile, not troubling himself as to his whereabouts or errand; then gradually realised his dinner clothes; struggled, and recalled that he was going out to dinner; recalled it should now be Hampstead; judged it wasn't; felt a hungry void within him and looked at his wrist watch. It was two o'clock in the morning!

Silver sat up aghast in a moment and crying aloud in his astonishment, "Am I mad? Or who is?" He seized the speaking-tube: "Hey, Jarvis! You! Hey! Hey!"

The chauffeur presented the dim shape of a solid back, making no sign of response.

Silver rapped frantically on the glass. So for some while he called and rapped, his astonishment growing, alarm beginning, and then anger rushing over him in a torrent. He flung away the speaking tube and tried the doors. It wasn't that he intended to get out while travelling at that pace, but he just wished to feel that he could if he so desired. He could not, for the doors were jammed. He started to batter them, but his pride in his handsome possession was still new. He respected this august car too much to damage it.

Silver began to commune with himself frantically. He was being kidnapped. For what purpose ? He might be murdered ! On what count ? Who was Jarvis ? Where were they going ? And suddenly, queerly enough, he remembered the picture-house deal. The Atholl people were to make their answer to Ogilvey's to-day. Silver must get back to town ; or at least to some telephone or post office from which he could wire his proposition. It was nearly 2.30 now, and they were driving on relentlessly. Jarvis must take him back to London. They must turn instantly. Seven hours of this sort of driving ! Why, they must have done at least a hundred and eighty miles !

He sought the speaking tube again.

" Here, Jarvis, you bloody fool ! What in hell d'you think you're doing ? Where d'you think you're going ? Answer me ! Answer me, I say ! Damn you, answer me ! What the blazes do you mean ? Jarvis ! Hi ! " he bellowed. " Jarvis ! I say ! You gone staring mad, what ? Stop ! Stop ! Do you hear me ? This is going to be serious for you ! Stop, I tell you ! Stop ! Stop ! "

The chauffeur made no sign.

" Hi ! You crazy fool ! " he shouted. " I'll break the glass ! I'll get at you ! I'll break up the car ! Stop, I tell you ! S-t-o-p-p-p ! "

The car rushed like a swallow on the wing up a long hill, crested it and swooped down the other side. Trees, telegraph poles, like black skeletons, flew by. They gained

speed on a long stretch of straight highroad. The speedometer, which Silver could not see, jumped from fifty to sixty—sixty-five—seventy—eighty miles.

"I'm going for it!" Silver yelled, beside himself, and he smashed the wall of glass that hemmed him in, and the cool wind sang through. Then he felt their speed slacken.

"A-ha!" he shouted; but he was afraid, and his heart raced oddly. He wound his muffler round his hand and broke the splintered glass clean away from the frame. When he could get his other arm safely through he hit at the chauffeur, caught him full on the mouth, and drew his hand in again with blood on the knuckles.

"A-ha!" he yelled. "That'll teach you to stop when I tell you! You madman! Now pull up!"

The chauffeur drove on, but cautiously, and with one arm swung back to hold off Silver. But Silver fought, and the car swerved and swayed.

"You'll kill us both!" Silver screamed.

So at last the car drew up, suddenly, silently, within its own length, and the man in the driving seat turned and caught his opponent's arms. They wrestled across the broken frame. Silver battled like a lunatic, and with about as much skill, for a long minute that seemed an hour before he was hurled back into the car. He fell heavily into the cushiony seat, panting.

"Come quietly," said the chauffeur in a very low voice, which indubitably was not the voice of Jarvis.

"Who are you?" cried Silver, staring.

He saw a pair of keen eyes between the peak of a pulled-down cap and the upturned collar of a coat, fixing him.

"Coming quietly?"

"I'm damned if I am!" cried Silver, his rage boiling over his fears, and he flung himself at the jammed door.

He wrenched and struggled furiously, all his weight on it, and suddenly the door gave way and he fell out on the roadside, cursing. He felt as if all his limbs were doubled

helplessly beneath him somehow; but they were not, for he leaped to his feet in an instant; yet almost before that instant had passed the other man was on him.

Silver had a little knowledge of fighting. He danced out to the middle of the road with his fists up, and instinctively guarded his head and middle. The other man jumped in as if he enjoyed it, made a quick feint and got in a quicker blow. Silver broke and ran, suddenly thinking, "I might be able to get away." One of the most side-splitting rounds ever fought was fought in that moonlit road that April night between the half-brothers, King and Silver Garnet.

It made King Garnet laugh. Silver would feint and run; King would follow, round him in and make him fight. Again, breathless, perspiring, Silver would feint and run. He did not want to laugh. He had no wind even to curse, and that he wanted to do badly. Again King would follow, round him in, drive him back towards the car and make him fight. As far as Silver was concerned, there was no infighting; he was for the ropes all the time; and the ropes were the horizon, but he never got there. He was soon so winded that his arms waved and his blows fell as feebly as a baby's. When a right-hander to the chin that had a mere featherweight of King's weight behind it sent him down, he lay there, resting and thankful.

But King Garnet, alert, sound, untouched in mind or limb, undistressed, stood over him, calling the count, "One—two—three—" with the earnest, lilting joy of a small boy playing a fine game; "four—five—six—seven—" Silver wondered dizzily and wrathfully if he were expected to stand up to it again—"eight—nine—ten—time!" Silver raised himself on his elbow, stertorously breathing.

"Stop this mad fooling! I've had enough! Stop it, I say!"

"You've not had enough," came the reply. "Stand

up and get to it! Now if we'd only got the gloves this'd be fine!"

Silver was hauled bodily to his reluctant feet. A mere tap on the nose—yet too hard to be pleasant—caused him instantly to frame up again. This time he had to fight without a breakaway. His adversary drove to him close whenever he turned and ducked and dodged, and the hail of blows Silver furiously rained never got through the other's guard. He beat at him like a whirling flail, and never touched him once. That time when he went down he just lay flaccid and let the count go by. He looked up at the big figure in the neat livery.

"Who are you?" he sulked.

The other did not reply. He took a cord from his pockets, suddenly whipped it about Silver before he had regained strength for an effectual struggle, and in three minutes had him propped, trussed like a fowl, on the floor of the car.

They drove again through the moonlit night. Now and again Silver let out a yell, but there was no one to hear, and from his lowly position the yell was almost lost in the rush of the car. The moon disappeared; the intense predawn dark succeeded the white light. They drove on and on, through lane and highroad, sleeping village and sleeping town, till Silver kept crying aloud to himself, "Where in hell's he taking me? You dirty bully! You—you thief! You blackguard! Where're you taking me?"

In the early morning the car stopped, the driver climbed stiffly down, stretched his arms and legs and surveyed mile upon mile of rock and heather, with the pink dawn cold and clear over all. Dartmoor was looking her loveliest and best in the early hours of an early April day. And there was not a soul in sight; not a living thing; not a wild pony, not a sheep, not a shepherd; only, mile upon mile, the rolling moor.

King Garnet pulled his cap down farther, rolled the

collar of his coat up farther, opened the car door and felt Silver over, quite kindly. Silver flinched and cursed. King Garnet cut his bonds.

"Take your clothes off," he said, "and hand 'em out to me."

Silver fairly raged.

"If you don't," said King Garnet, "I'll take 'em off you myself. I give you five minutes."

He closed the door, leaned up negligently against the car and lighted a cigarette. In two minutes, listening, he heard no signs of Silver's obedience. He banged upon the door and caught a movement. Then a grunt or two, a groan or two from Silver expressed the reluctance of his bruised body to be undressed. In three minutes more the clothes were flung through the window.

King Garnet returned the courtesy; first his livery cap; next his livery coat; garment after garment was thrust through to the shivering victim within. He stood up without a stitch on him, and rejoiced in the air that ran round and over him, clean and beautiful; and he groaned, looking in ecstasy at the heather, "Oh, Lord, I'd like to roll in it and sleep!"

But instead, he dressed swiftly in Silver's evening clothes, filling them out, stretching them to straining point; and when Silver opened the car door with a howl of rage he was confronted by a perfect vision of a young man about town, looking not so much the worse for wear as merely like the morning after the night before.

Silver Garnet crimsoned to his hair. His eyes were bolting from their sockets. He stared. He stammered. At last he uttered in a great cry, "You—you devil!" And raising his fists he drove uselessly at his half-brother.

"What's this?" he shouted. "Where are we?"

"Now, you stand off and listen," said King Garnet. "Where we are doesn't matter. I'm leaving you a flask of brandy, a packet of sandwiches and a compass. Steer

north-east for twelve miles and you'll come in sight of some shepherd's huts, and they'll direct you farther. I don't say you haven't a day's march before you, taking it by and large ; but still you can make it. You'll find the car garaged in a certain village for you. You only have to tell the police—when you next communicate with 'em—and they'll find it all right. Good-morning, Brother Silver. This is where I laugh, this time."

He moved round to the driving seat. Silver leapt after him.

"You're not going to leave me here ! "

"I am going to do precisely that."

"I've got important business in London to-day."

"Sorry ; it'll have to wait."

"It can't wait ! " Silver yelled.

"It'll have to. Now see, I've left you the compass and the other stuff there on the ground. Pick it all up. Don't lose it ; you'll want it all."

"I'll make you suffer for this ! You and your footling insults ! Your practical jokes ! I'll make you suffer ! "

"You may and you mayn't," said King Garnet nonchalantly.

"I'm coming with you, anyway," cried Silver, holding on frantically to the car.

Garnet knocked him off and knocked him down. Silver rose as the car started, and for a moment or two he ran after it like a furious little boy. Like a furious little boy he could have sobbed. And he hated his half-brother with a hatred so deep that it seemed to settle into the very roots of him. But all King Garnet was thinking as he drove away was what easy game the fellow seemed to be ; how childlike he was ; how soft he was ; what a poor heart he had.

He drove over Dartmoor under the mounting sun and heard the larks singing very high, and he extolled everything. With the money he found in Silver's pockets he bought a ready-made suit at the first little country tailor's

he passed. He garaged the car, left the evening clothes in it and bought himself a rail ticket up to London. He went straight to his own rooms, changed into his own clothes, went out and sold the new suit.

He went to Maddox—who still received him, but now with frowns and deprecation—and said, "Please recommend me to a nice little lawyer—not your size man at all—who will do what he's told for his money."

Maddox recommended such a man—after having declared in a stately manner knowledge of none such—and King Garnet went on to the Sub-International Bank in King William Street and drew his money.

It was safe! It happened like a fairy tale! Bobby and his confederate had not stopped the cheque.

Then he went on to the little lawyer, and he spoke to him of Anna Land. He laid the five hundred pounds in a handsome roll before him. They plotted together: King Garnet not to be in this business at all; but an uncle in New Zealand dying without heir, and the next-of-kin to be a Miss Anna Land.

The little lawyer said he would advertise for Miss Land next morning, acting as the representative of a New Zealand firm of lawyers—an Auckland firm, say. Better to be specific—and such firm he could easily look up in the Colonial Law List, he thought.

They settled that his fee should be nearly all the money King had received for the new tweed suit and the rest of the change left from Silver's pockets. The little lawyer, judging cleverly that there was no more, accepted things on this basis.

He suggested, having a certain amount of sympathy still in him, that this young man should hand the money to the lady and save expenses.

But King Garnet replied, "Miss Land is a lady who would object to being under an obligation to anyone; and that, you see, is my difficulty. I wish her to feel free and unhampered entirely."

"Quixotic, my dear fellow, quixotic," remarked the little lawyer with a smile.

So there in that rather drab office King Garnet arranged with the little lawyer, who would do whatever he was paid for, the great scheme of Anna's future. And he walked out happy; rich as a prince in that he had royally put the toy she coveted into the lap of the woman he adored. Inasmuch as he could protect her she was protected. No man had done it but him.

He held the foot of her ladder while she climbed. He shook Silver Garnet—and all the Silver Garnets—off her golden stair.

Then he went to the Charlton Restaurant. But his place was filled. He knew last night that he had taken that risk. He went home again, workless. Before he slept he made a note in his memorandum book: "I owe Silver Garnet nine pounds eleven shillings."

It was the exact sum he had taken from Silver's pockets. He grinned ruefully and thought: "I wonder how long he'll have to whistle for that now."

XVIII.

An exhausted, incredulous, raving, foaming Silver travelled up to town three days after, still clad in his chauffeur's cast-off livery, rang his own door-bell, stumbled past his concerned butler, pushed into the library and kept his finger on the electric-bell push till almost the whole household crowded to the door. The butler held them back, and entered.

"Sir, we have been in great distress——"

"Distress be damned! Where's my secretary?"

"Powell is fetching Mr. Bobby, sir."

"Where's that cursed Jarvis?"

"Sir—Jarvis has been awfully upset, sir; came straight home to Mr. Bobby, and——"

"Where's my car?"

"We have the car, sir. I traced it easily, of course. . . . Will you take tea, sir? Will you rest till dinner, sir?"

Bobby entered. With the air of the perfect secretary in command taking control of the situation, he dismissed the butler with a brief look. He came right up to Silver.

"Good Lord, sir! Where have you been?"

"Look here!" Silver began in a stammering voice. "How would you explain all this——"

"All what, sir?"

"I'll tell you. And you shall tell me what you think of it. That half-brother of mine——"

"King Garnet, sir? King Garnet?"

"That's the only half-brother I have, and one too much!" Silver bellowed. "Look here! Do you know what happened?"

"I, sir? How can I? Jarvis came home and said you'd disappeared with the car. I considered that couldn't happen in a London street before a well-known club without your previous intention."

"My intention! My intention!"

"If you will allow me to give a résumé of my course of action, Mr. Garnet—thank you. You see, you're not exactly a man who babbles; you don't always take others into your confidence." Bobby watched Silver's slightly mollified face, and went on: "Besides that, you're a man of intensely quick thought and action. With you, to think is to act. I said to Jarvis: 'Mr. Garnet's got some big scoop on and doesn't trust anyone with the secret; that's about it.' However, I didn't feel quite justified in letting it go at that; and yet not justified in spying upon you, sir. You understand? Then Julius Hepburn rang up and said you hadn't arrived. So, unauthorised as I was, I rang up Scotland Yard and explained the situation. I told 'em I was not authorised——"

"Not authorised be——"

"Well, Mr. Garnet, the police traced the car; and Jarvis went down, obtained a description of the man who garaged it, judged it was not yourself, waited a day, then drove it back."

"And I was wandering about, lost on Dartmoor!"

"Dartmoor, sir!"

"Dartmoor! Thick mist all day the second day. I swear I couldn't see my compass in my hand!"

"You had provided yourself with a compass, sir?"

"I had provided myself with no such thing, you fool!"

"Would it not be better to control yourself, sir?"

"I beg pardon," said Silver, and lapsed into a chair, whence he looked up helplessly and ferociously at Bobby.

"My half-brother——" he began in a sort of bark.

Bobby waved aside Silver's story with extreme politeness, and concluded his own.

"Not having the foggiest idea of what you were up to, of what you wished kept quiet for reasons of your own, I asked the police that there should be no publicity, that all inquiries should be secretly conducted; and I gave the servants very strict orders indeed not to talk. I'm sure I hope I did right. I wish I had been in your confidence, though; and I think you should know me well enough now to trust me."

"Trust——"

"Yes; trust me, Mr. Garnet. I am sorry if I sound a little sore. I am sore."

"Not so sore as I am, I'll bet!" cried Silver furiously, recalling and still wincing from his recent bruising.

"The police," added Bobby, "are hardly satisfied with the affair so far, and would like to pursue it further, I suppose, or receive your explanation."

"They can do both!" said Silver. "My half-brother is in this."

Bobby remarked very quietly, "Ah, yes, you were saying that King Garnet——" And to himself he was

saying, "Gosh! I might have known! Wonder why I never tumbled. Johnson? Why, it was easy!"

"Look here!" said Silver, sitting up and speaking very fast. "Jarvis got down at the Senior Charlton to deliver that book you said old Ivinghoe was so set on. He went right up the steps and inside. You know that club? Well, in a moment or two he came down again, as I thought, and drove off. After Regent's Park I fell asleep——"

"You fell asleep, sir!"

"Don't I tell you so? What was in those cocktails, eh?"

"Cocktails?" said Bobby with good-tempered scorn. "Nothing. You had one——"

"I had two."

"You had two, then. I had three. Didn't hurt me. Drop of gin, bitters, mixed Vermouth, dash of absinth. That can't make you drunk. Two of those!"

"I wasn't drunk; I fell asleep."

Bobby paused a long while, very politely, with complete incredulity. With ridicule tempered by kindness he commented: "You shouldn't take two. Not used to 'em strong yet. You've no head. I should have remembered it. Still, I recall now; you would take two."

Silver was always a little ashamed of his inability to carry his liquor like a man.

He said hastily: "I tell you I fell asleep. Well, I'd had a tiring day; all that business, and so on. When I awoke we were right out in the country. And the man in the driving seat wasn't Jarvis!"

"Of course, he couldn't have been, since Jarvis came home," said Bobby; "but it sounds like a penny novelette. Who was it?"

"My half-brother!" Silver proceeded frenziedly with the whole story. At the end he saw Paul Bobby straddling before the fire, very slim, very perfect, staring at him with open mouth that suddenly curled into laughter.

"Good Lord!" said Bobby. "Forgive me, sir! I——" He checked the laugh by what appeared a heroic effort.

"Mr. Garnet, allow me to say, you can never make a ludicrous story like that public."

"I can't?"

"Well, if you like; as you wish—but you'd be the laughing-stock of London."

Silver Garnet had imagined himself in many rôles, but never that of laughing-stock. Now his dangerous adventure began to assume a humiliating guise. It took on the appearance of a hugh practical joke played against him. He was outraged and humbled. He would so much have preferred to see the thing as a murder plot, drastic and important.

"Fine joke!" he growled.

"Well, it came off," said Bobby appreciatively. Then adroitly he changed his tone, took on sympathy and added:

"Beastly for you, Mr. Garnet, none the less. However, your half-brother has satisfied his sense of revenge, I suppose. He kidnapped you, beat you up, made you wander about Dartmoor for two or three days in your own chauffeur's rig, and then travel up to town in it. He wanted to make you look a fool before the world. He's aching for the publicity now! Well, I say, don't give it to him!"

"I won't!" Silver shouted. "I never saw it like that; but now I do. Glad I told you before I did anything. Publicity! His joke shall fall flat; flat on its face! No one shall even hear of it. It's contemptible! I won't fight! Let's have tea." Bobby rang.

"Wouldn't you like first to get out of that kit, Mr. Garnet?"

"Perhaps I will; and bathe; and shave. Perhaps they'd better send a cup of tea to my room, Bobby. It'll be dinner-time directly."

"Or one of my famous cocktails," Bobby suggested with an affectionate smile, "and only one of 'em to-night. No falling asleep, because I'm going to take you to Lucia Aveline's for bridge after dinner. She's been telephoning you half a dozen times."

She had not. Bobby had telephoned her once on the subject. But Silver believed readily, and a smile lighted his face for the first time since he had returned.

"Has she though? Nice little woman, Bobby—fascinating. We'll go."

On his way to the door he paused.

"And my picture-house deal has gone to blazes, I suppose. There was I, on that infernal moor, in the mist; no telegraph, no telephone. You may grin; so may the other fools. But I curse—I curse that blackguard, and the sooner he burns in hell the better I'll like it."

Bobby looked at him gravely.

"I could do nothing. If you'd only left me your instructions! You gave me no authority. You were doing the thing on your own. I couldn't even telephone Atholl's and give them a hint. I didn't know what your latest plans were. There are times when you might do better, as I say, to trust me, sir, and not keep everything in your own hands exclusively. But that's the worst of you giants. You think nobody can do a thing except yourselves."

Silver responded with restored pride: "As you say, that's the worst of us. I own I was wrong. But——" Then he said, jealously, "What about the picture-houses?"

"I hear Ogilvey's bought 'em. The deal went through yesterday."

"Hear the price?"

"Sixty thousand. There were no other bidders, you see."

"No other bidders," cried Silver, "because I was down on that awful moor, walking till I dropped! Oh, it's a wonderful joke for fools to grin at, I'm sure! Well, Ogilvey's got those two houses cheap."

"Because there were no other bidders at their figure."

"Except me!" raged Silver. "Except me!"

His rage crept up into his throat again and swelled it and blurred his eyes so that he fumbled for the door-knob.

There he turned again on a thought, to ask, "Has—has Miss Land happened to telephone?"

Anna Land never telephoned to Silver in the ordinary course of things; but this afternoon Bobby was able to reply truthfully, "She rang up this afternoon, sir."

"She did!" Silver exclaimed eagerly. "What about?"

"She didn't say. Asked for you. Shall I——" He made a movement towards the telephone.

"Yes," said Silver. "No, I'll ring her up from my own room."

He went out and was half-way upstairs in his stiff and hateful clothes, when he heard Bobby behind him. The young man was smiling deprecatingly, affectionately.

"I say, sir! Since you're having an unpleasant afternoon, anyway, I may as well say something I have to say and get it all over now. I'm sorry—very sorry for myself, that is—that I have to leave you."

"Eh?" said Silver, turning; and his jaw dropped.

"Got a big contract offered," Bobby explained with charming regret; "five years—to make pictures."

"Who with?"

"Ogilvey's, of all people," Bobby replied with a gesture that implied his personal reluctance.

Silver just turned and continued his way upstairs. He stalked into his room and banged the door.

They had hastily lighted his fire. It blazed. The April day was a little chill; and he, anyway, had been chilled to the marrow in the Dartmoor mist and felt as if he would never be really warm again.

Pending the preparation of the bath, he wrapped his thick silk dressing-gown round him and, sitting on his bed, took up his telephone from the table beside his pillow and rang up Anna. The landlady replied that she was in.

During the interval between the reply and the calling of Anna by the landlady to the general house telephone—she had none installed—he fumed in expectation. Why

had she rung him up ? It broke through her habit of cool silence. Then her voice came, and he answered :

" Hello, Anna. This is me—Silver Garnet. . . . Yes. . . . What did you want to speak to me about, dear ? "

Her answer came : " Oh, Silver, I've had a legacy ! "

" A what ? A legacy ? " Again his jaw fell. " Oh, I—I—I say ! Isn't that wonderful ! And how much ? "

" Silver it's a miracle ! Exactly five hundred pounds ! "

He rasped : " Oh, wonderful ! I suppose I congratulate you. So now you don't want me."

She answered gaily : " Don't put it like that ! I'm grateful ; but relieved that I don't have to be more grateful. It's just your kind thought that earns my present gratitude ; and kind thoughts are all I want to take from anyone if I can help it. Thank you for your congratulations."

He cried hastily into the transmitter, " See you to-night at your sister's, eh ? "

" I am coming on to supper."

" Good-bye, then," Silver snapped, and he slapped the receiver on the hook again. " That's that ! " he said.

Bobby entered with that cocktail, subtle, winking.

" Brought it myself," he uttered with solicitious concern. Silver took it and tossed it off.

" Exactly the same as the other night," said Bobby.

He stood and watched Silver graciously, arms akimbo.

The butler-valet stole in.

" Your bath, sir."

Silver gathered his rich dressing gown around him. He looked mournfully at Bobby.

" I shall miss you," he said, and he said it with deep and real feeling. He would miss Bobby.

He went into his bathroom and plunged sickly into the hot waters of rest and oblivion.

XIX.

Silver went, after all, in a mood of restored *amour propre* to Lucia's little Mayfair house. Bobby had plied him with exactly the right wines to the right amount at dinner. A hot bath had steamed away most of his bodily stiffness, and Bobby's tongue was skilled in the art of soothing ruffled pride. So it was with pleasure that he grasped Lucia's thin white hand—remembering how, according to Bobby, she had rung him up half a dozen times in her desire for his company—and looking into her thin white face, expressed, a little pompously, his delight at being with her again.

He missed, being concerned with himself as usual, the strain in her smile, the lost stare of her blue eyes, and the extreme wilted fragility of her. She shook hands with Bobby next, without a word. For Bobby her eyes were downcast, her look tremulous. Silver passed on quickly to where he saw Anna standing on the other side of the small drawing-room.

He reached her, scowling away the one or two people who were talking with her; and they were alone, if the yard or so of space his black look had cleared round them constituted aloneness.

"Thank you for your news this afternoon," he began in a high-pitched voice of reproach.

"Thank you for your congratulations, Silver."

"I meant them!" he replied sardonically.

"Let us sit down," said Anna. "Tell me what you have been doing."

They sat down on a chesterfield just behind them.

"I've been doing nothing particularly pleasant," said Silver. "Let's hear what you have been doing, and all about this wonderful affair of your legacy. I never heard you say you had any relations."

"This was an uncle of mine, according to the lawyers; my mother's sister's second husband, whom she married in New Zealand, so none of us knew him. I didn't even know my aunt had gone to New Zealand and died there; in fact I never even knew that aunt. It was her money that I inherit. Aren't things queer?"

"They are," Silver growled, "what with convenient fictitious aunts and legacies from the other side of the world. Oh, very queer!"

"There's nothing fictitious about this," Anna said with spirit. "The lawyers——"

"Who are they?"

She told him, and Silver looked wise.

"Shall ask Maddox about 'em," said he importantly.

"Oh, do," said Anna, with a little humourous curl of the lip for Silver. "But it's all *bona fide*. This lawyer is acting for a New Zealand firm who wound up my aunt's small affairs. I have the money."

"Paid right over?" said Silver. "A-ha!"

"I never know what you mean by A-ha, Silver. I don't believe you mean anything."

"A-ha!" said Silver.

"My singing-master is helping me to arrange my concert; he is persuading various men to go to it—Marini, Golda, Herman Baron——" She mentioned a string of musical directors, impresarios and singers of note. "We have taken the Queen's Hall. I'm practising all day! Ferrugi's letting me off some of my songs at the Charlton to rest my voice; he is letting the concert be advertised by leaflets on the dinner tables . . . . Silver, it's a kind world!"

"You didn't always find it so, my child."

"I always thought it fine, Silver."

"Yes, you had a lot of silly notions about everything, Anna; always had——"

"And always shall have, according to you."

"The world," said Silver in a trumpet-like voice, laying down his law, "is what you force it to be, my dear. The

world is out for all the golden eggs one can lay, and the moment the last is laid they kill the poor goose. The world, my child, has no pity, no compassion, no generosity, no love that isn't paid for, and paid for high. The world only serves a man according to the respect he can wring from it. I'm not making a personal complaint, please understand. No! What I want I get; what I demand, I have. Of course, I—men like me—are a specific instance. We aren't general. In the abstract the world is as I explain to you. But some of you women will never open your eyes."

One or two persons had turned round as Silver trumpeted this, and were whispering to one another, "Who on earth is he?" He saw their stares and caught the sound if not the gist of their comments. He imagined them saying, "Listen! That's Silver Garnet speaking over there."

He said to Anna, with an airy laugh and a shrug, "I'm altogether too well known to be truthful out loud, my dear. Come to the balcony a few moments, where we shall be really alone."

"If there is time before supper," she answered doubtfully.

They rose and wended through thick little groups of chattering people to where the open French windows gave on to a covered-in balcony.

"I want to make love to you, Anna," said Silver in a heavy, purposeful voice. "I want to make you love me."

"Don't say it any more, Silver!"

"I shall say it and say it and say it!" replied Silver passionately. His eyes were hot and jealous. "This is a bitter disappointment to me, Anna—not to be helping you. I wanted to! But if you think it is going to carry you right away from me, this poor little five hundred pounds of yours, you are mistaken. It won't buy much of the world you want—a sum like that! I shall come back over and over again; and one day when you see and confess that every step of the way you wish to take must

be taken over stones and with tears, why, you'll decide to drive over it with me in my limousine."

"You're eloquent!"

"I've not said half I could say. It's not in me to talk; I'm not that kind of man. The man who talks loses force, Anna. I have my force pent-up within me, and there it will stay.

"Force! What all you women worship if you will only confess it. Well, at long last every woman confesses it. She worships force and power."

"Oh, Silver, the myths that men teach themselves to believe!"

"No, no, my child! It's what women have taught men."

"Perhaps, Silver. But the women don't believe it themselves."

"It profits them to pretend to," said Silver angrily.

"Is pretence enough for you, Silver?"

"It would serve me, if it must, as it serves other men," said Silver.

"Men want too little," said Anna.

He laid a hand upon her arm.

"Soft as a flower, dear," he said meltingly. "And I love you. Close your eyes. Let yourself go. Don't think. Let me think for you. Darling girl, why not announce to-night——"

She dropped her arm under his touch.

"And that would be good enough for you, Silver?"

"You, anyhow, anywhere, would be good enough for me," Silver flared.

"As I say," Anna murmured, "you want too little. Let us go in again."

"No!" said Silver, and he stood before her, trying to win her to delay.

But with a slight smile that flicked his vanity harder than an open laugh would have done, she slid by him and stood on the threshold of the drawing-room, within sight of all eyes again.

Her look was caught by her sister, talking to Lord Ivinghoe. Old Ivinghoe's admiring stare apparently saw nothing but what he wished to see. The pleasant deception of Lucia's graceful phrasing, her amusing wit, her smile, her trick of eyebrow were enough to keep him charmed.

But Anna looked over the threshold at her sister and saw all her whiteness, her frailty, her evanescent beauty, on the edge of disaster. Anna sensed disaster, and would have liked to clear the room roughly and sit down by the fire with Lucia and take the tired one in her arms.

She said to Silver, " Lucia's very fatigued to-night."

She hated Silver for his reply : " Well, your sister is not so young as she was, my dear ; and that type doesn't wear. It burns out."

Without vouchsafing him another look Anna walked into the room and stood near Lucia. And as if feeling the shadow of a rock in her weary land, Lucia turned to see who it was, saw Anna, and sent her a smile. That smile pulled at the strings of Anna's heart.

At the same moment was announced : " Mrs. Garnet ; Lady Mabel Conway."

Lucia more than rose to the occasion. She beckoned Silver with a smile to follow her as she went forward to receive the two women, and fastened him to them with her " Dear Mrs. Garnet ; Mabel, you darling, here is the very person of all others who should be here for you to-night."

" Mrs. Aveline is right, you know," purred Mrs. Garnet, with a smile. " We ought to know each other better. The whole thing has been gauche, absurd. Now, my dear man, as a man of the world, tell me candidly if you don't think it is gauche and absurd ? "

And Silver found himself in a flattered voice replying, " Well, I answer to a woman of the world, dear lady, that I do."

An expressive sigh betokened her relief.

She said, " Have you met Lady Mabel Conway ? Mabel, darling, Mr. Silver Garnet."

In the last three months Lady Mabel had been brought to see what Mrs. Garnet called plaintively the mere common sense of her attitude. Silver had, by a catastrophe, the family money; Silver was a silly man; Silver could part with a nice little slice of it again.

Lady Mabel, ever malleable, now positively thought this the right point of view. Her poor friend was penniless, save for charity. She had hated Silver reasonlessly on behalf of King; but King had failed her; King did not care. Callously King had disappeared. Without faltering she held out her very small ringed hand to Silver, and murmured most sweetly:

"You must come and see us soon, Mr. Garnet. Mrs. Garnet is staying with me, you know."

"I am obliged to," sighed Mrs. Garnet.

"Darling!" said Mabel reproachfully; and to Silver: "Have you our address? Why not lunch to-morrow?"

Silver sat down between the women on the chesterfield, where a few minutes before he had been sitting with Anna. Anna was now talking to Marini, the great impresario; and Silver's eyes, wandering to her, came back to Mabel's little placid face and stayed there.

He was thinking in an ill-concealed fluster: "Lady Mabel Conway, only daughter of the late Earl of Aldersley. Brother tuberculous. . . . H'm, h'm! She's going to inherit somehow; I've heard that. Countess in her own right by-and-bye——"

Lady Mabel's small, pleading voice was murmuring: "We've just come back from wandering in the East. We've had rather a wonderful time. I'll show you all the photographs we took if you do consent to come and lunch with us in Bruton Street. I wanted this poor darling"—her hand on Mrs. Garnet's, affectionately—"to forget all her troubles for a while, so I took her away."

"Very kind and nice of you, I'm sure, Lady Mabel. But you took this lady off in such a hurry that I—I—well, I—there wasn't time to discuss and make certain

arrangements which, of course, I had every intention of making."

Lady Mabel's eyes rolled very softly at Silver.

"Oh, but!" said Mrs. Garnet.

"And my feelings were hurt," Silver confessed to Mabel. "Stupid, no doubt, but there it is. My feelings were pretty hurt by—er——"

"I know," murmured Mabel, and for a moment her face clouded as she thought of King.

"I feel I should like you to understand," Silver protested earnestly to her.

"I do understand," she said.

"As I was saying, I should have made arrangements if I had had the least time or opportunity or—or encouragement given to me. I wanted encouragement, I must say. Just a little. I know I don't look like that. In my career I've had to cultivate a sort of granite exterior." He smiled down at Mabel, who was wonderfully taking it all in, and he thought she looked very small.

"Yes, I may look like granite, Lady Mabel; but the fact is I'm cruelly sensitive; cruelly so."

"I am so sorry," said Mrs. Garnet in her gracious voice; "I was so sorry at the time. And I said—but what's the use of telling you? It is over."

"No, no," said Silver; "it is not over."

"Oh, but," Mrs. Garnet said, "I couldn't possibly——"

"You not only could but you will," said Silver powerfully. Somehow, looking even for so brief a time at Mabel had made him feel genuinely masterful. "I'm a man who usually does what he sets out to do, Mrs. Garnet. And I am a man who never on any account evades responsibilities. Why should I? My shoulders are broad enough in all conscience!" He felt Mabel actually look at his shoulders. He went on: "I have liabilities to undertake. I have never thought otherwise. This is neither the time nor the place——"

"No! No!" Mrs. Garnet agreed helplessly.

" But if you are coming to lunch with us to-morrow——" said Mabel, and once more she laid her very small hand, glittering with rings of an antique loveliness that even Silver's ignorance could appreciate, on Mrs. Garnet's.

" What time ? " Silver asked.

" One-thirty," said Mabel.

He murmured, " Thanks—thanks."

He guessed that on the morrow they would ask him if he had news of King, and he rehearsed his noncommittal answers. They could, of course, go to their lawyer, that man Maddox, for affairs of that sort. But now the two women sat, one on either side of him, talking gaily of their tour. It had ended in Paris, of course. Hardly had they been able to tear themselves from the dress salons of Paris. He looked at them admiringly. Even Mrs. Garnet, much as he would have wished to despise her, impelled his wonder and awe at her soft and well-bred perfection. These frocks that fitted them in sleek lines as if grown to their skins ; these jewels blazing, and yet never blazing too much ; these tuneful voices ; these suave manners that made him feel almost easy before them—all these, he knew, were the ultimate perfection.

He thought masterfully of Mrs. Garnet : " Well, well ; she'll be useful. Crowds of the right friends ; make her an allowance ; make her friends mine ; yes, she'll be useful."

Of Mabel he was more afraid ; towards her he went more uncertainly. There was nothing there to buy. She wanted nothing of him. As such, she was an aloof and sealed book. And yet, was she so very aloof ? Hadn't he impressed her ? He thought he had.

But still he went reverently with Lady Mabel. He hung with ingrained and natural respect upon every look and word, though all her looks and words were colourless.

At supper Lucia had him seated between them, and opposite Anna. He could feast his eyes jealously on Anna, turn for balm to little Mabel. Mrs. Garnet added to the

mixture a carefully weighed modicum of flattery, sympathy and admiration. From his point of view supper was a success.

Old Ivinghoe remembered him too. He put up his lorgnette and bawled, "Good evening, Garnet!" down the table. Old Ivinghoe did not yet know that his five-hundred-guinea fee as a director of Garnet's Superfilm might never now materialise—or not for some while anyway.

After supper Anna sang.

He heard people whisper: "Beautiful!" "Marvellous!" "What a range!" "And a lovely girl!" He gathered that Marini was making wondrous prophecies.

Anna shone. He coveted her terribly; but Lady Mabel comforted him.

The evening waned. People thinned. He saw Paul Bobby again. Of Bobby he had an impression that the exquisite youth had spent much time with Lucia, or that she had snatched much time with him. It had been noticeable anyway. He mentioned it to Bobby when they were in the car together, driving home.

"In great favour with Mrs. Aveline, eh, Paul?"

"Oh, no," smiled Bobby, settling comfortably back. "No, no."

"I'm lunching with Lady Mabel to-morrow in Bruton Street."

"You are?" said Bobby lazily. "Good! Coming on, aren't we?"

"You really leaving me, eh, boy?"

"I'm sorry to say, sir, that I am. Much regret it, I'm sure."

"I shall miss you," Silver repeated. A few moments after, he said, "The women will be asking me to-morrow, I suppose, for news of that precious half-brother of mine. You advise me to keep quiet, eh?"

"For your own sake, sir, I would."

Silver muttered, "Your advice is always pretty good, I

guess." And to the youth's inward derision he reached out, took his hand and shook it solemnly. "Yes, Bobby, your advice is always—pretty—fairly—good. I'll take it."

Silver Garnet and Paul Bobby had been almost the last to leave. Marini had preceded them. Lady Mabel and Mrs. Garnet said good-night next. The very last to go, save Anna, was old Lord Ivinghoe. He lingered over Lucia's frail hand for an unconscionable while, Anna, in the background, waiting for that bed-time talk which both the sisters loved, despising impatiently the futile old man.

There was about Lucia an indescribably weary and bruised air. Anna knew it. Old Ivinghoe did not. He only saw the pretty woman as rather unbecomingly and regrettably tired, and he betrayed an inclination to pet her. He said she must take care of herself, or let him take care of her; she must run down to Brighton to sit in some real sun. She came back too early from the Riviera, he said; not too early for him or for her other faithful admirers —oh, dear, no! But too early for her dear self.

"Drink hot milk," he mumbled; "pints of it, quarts of it; with an extra dish of cream in. And see you deal with a dairyman who keeps Jersey cows. Rich milk. Finest thing in the world for thin—for fragile fairies like your adorable self."

Lucia looked up at old Ivinghoe as he stood above her, his corset keeping him erect, his excellent tailoring still setting off his once fine shoulders. She read his eyes; she knew that slightly critical, appraising, disappointed look in men's eyes—her dearest mirrors. Once no man ever felt disappointment as he looked at her. Once she had been flawless.

She pulled herself together, flashed, sparkled and smiled —even for old Ivinghoe it was worth while. For the instant she drooped no longer. She was the magnetic, vital, soft kitten that she had been for so long. Ivinghoe

responded with a warm, delighted, kind look. He kissed her hand.

"Oh, I know," said Lucia, flashing with her cunning smile, "that I'll soon be a mere bag of bones; a scraggy horse to hang the clothes on."

"You absurd child!" Ivinghoe replied warmly. He patted her shoulder. "Be thankful you're so light built, such a fairy in every way. You'll never age—when that far-off time comes—you'll never age fat. Lucky woman!"

Again he kissed her hand; and Anna moved impatiently nearer.

"But what's the use of preaching early bed and hot milk to you if I linger here, making a nuisance of myself?" said Lord Ivinghoe. "I'll go. I'll tear myself away. Good-night, Mrs. Aveline. Good-night, Miss Land. A thousand thanks for your songs. I'm coming to your concert—bringing this lovely lady, if I may." He looked at Lucia, and she smiled acquiescence. "Good-night," the old Don Juan repeated, and went out.

Almost before he had reached the door Lucia's access of vivacity had died away. She leaned upon the mantelpiece, drooping. Anna, who had walked a few paces with their last guest towards the door, turned back to see her sister leaning there as if all life, all volition, had left her. For a few seconds Anna stood still there, near the door, with fear at her heart, regarding her. The fear was almost terror for Lucia. The knowledge came to her mysteriously that in some way, by some means, her sister had that night reached fatal cross-roads, looked down each, knew not which way to turn, knew nothing except that she could not go back. The road behind was barred to her. The empty roads before her were strange; and they went down; they went down——

Then Lucia raised herself from her strengthless drooping posture, braced herself for an instant, lifted her head and looked at Anna. There was a faint and joyless smile on

her face. The face itself was ravaged, emotion swept, worn, lined.

"Well, Anna," she said quietly.

"Lucia," Anna whispered.

"I am fated," said Lucia. "Life is a fatal sort of business. There comes a time when quite suddenly a woman meets her fate. Nothing can help her."

"What is it, Lucia?" Anna whispered.

"Let us go to my room, as we always do," said Lucia.

She moved from the fading wood fire, looked curiously round the room that she had made so carefully as a setting for herself. All her settings for so long had been chosen to enhance her; or that she failed them. She walked towards Anna with fainting feet and falling shoulders, as the dead may walk who are called to rise and know they have nothing to live for. Anna put her arm about Lucia and led her out of the room.

Lucia's bedroom was on the landing above. They went up the flight of steep, narrow, soft-carpeted stairs to the next floor of the steep, narrow little house. The door was open; Marie was just emerging.

"I have taken in the hot milk, madame, two glasses; and the biscuits."

"Thank you," said Lucia. "I shall not want you again to-night."

The sisters were alone. They sat down together on the hearth rug before the wood fire.

"This reminds me much," said Lucia dreamily, "of how we used to sit, eighteen or twenty years ago. You a very small girl, I a big one; and I used to tell you of all the splendid things I meant to have; I used to describe the dresses I wanted; and you used to listen."

"There was one dress you meant to have—pink and crystal, with a velvet cloak to match."

"I had it."

Anna watched Lucia anxiously; so quiet, so dreamy she was, as if her emotions had at last worn themselves out.

There was a silence between them which grew momentarily more tremendous and unbreakable. Anna knew that with every second that passed the beginning of revelation—if Lucia indeed had any to make—would grow more difficult. Yet she could not break it; she was afraid; Lucia was so unanswerable a problem to her. So the silence lasted till at last she saw Lucia's eyelids drop over her eyes and tears steal out beneath them. Lucia sat crying without a pucker on her face, as women who have cried much can cry.

Anna reached with tender reverence for her hand.

"Darling, what is it?"

"I own," said Lucia, in a voice over which she had fair control, "that one must be beaten in the end. Only, Anna, I am not old. I am only forty-three now. . . . I suppose it is just that I've been greedy, over-eaten of the wrong sort of life like a child over-eats of sweets; and—that is what makes me feel old and sick."

"Lucia, you want a rest."

"Rest? Why, dear, you might say that to the charwoman you see scrubbing the doorsteps all down the street early in the morning—if one's up early enough to see the poor creatures—but how can you say it to me? What is my life spent on, if not on myself? On going to Cannes or Nice or Mürren or Paris, or somewhere if I'm bored; on calling up my doctor for the least ache or pain; on staying in bed if I'm the least bit overdone; on—on—massage and frocks and recreation; and rest if I want it; and—and everything? I spend all my life looking after myself, and I pay other people—servants—to spend their lives looking after me, too. When you and Ivinghoe come along, saying 'Rest; take care of yourself,' it—it seems ridiculous to me."

Anna drew Lucia against her in silence.

"It is a future that I want, Anna," said Lucia in a thin, rebellious voice; and her clenched fists kneaded one upon the other.

"There is a future, Lucia," said Anna, guiltily, because she knew the speciousness of her rejoinder.

"No," said Lucia, "none."

Then she wept openly and violently. After a long while she lay half against Anna's shoulder, half on her lap, quiet again. And now it was Lucia who was the little sister, wondering at life, and not Anna. Only Lucia wondered sadly, bewilderedly, as the child Anna had never done.

"Now tell me, Lucia," said Anna, hugging her close; "tell me really." For she knew that Lucia had something to tell.

Lucia said: "You know, Anna, we women—we deceive ourselves. There is a time when we don't have to; then there comes a time when we wish to be deceived; to be deceived by others and to deceive ourselves.

"I've lived for the admiration of men; I don't regret it, Anna; I don't blame myself; it's intoxication; it's glamour. No woman except a woman who's been beautiful or alluring or magnetic ever understands about it. For years one is on the pinnacle of romance. You may say it is only gilt; and if so, then gilt's good; it's wonderful while it lasts. And I would rather have gilt than the unadorned gingerbread most women seem to get all their lives. Only, my dear, one doesn't want to let go. One clings on for dear life; and the men become fewer. Then—then one doesn't pick and choose; one is picked and chosen—perhaps. And all the time one ties a handkerchief over one's eyes and says everything's the same. Because one wants to believe it, Anna!

"How can it be the same? It can't! Presently——"

Anna interrupted her in a hurried whisper; "You think too much about all this, Lucia."

"I do not. It has been my life just as your queer ideals seem to be yours. Let me finish. I want to talk myself out. I was saying, presently there are mere social acquaintances who come to one's parties—those only; and casual friends; and old flirts; and hard-up boys, as

I've told you before, who want their expenses paid. It comes gradually; so gradually you don't notice its progress until you get a shock some day; yes, it comes gradually like that to women like me, who've been able to depend just on their looks and their vitality and—things like that. Those undependable things—so perishable!" she cried bitterly.

"Yes," said Anna under her breath, "in life you've got to sow if you want any reaping."

Lucia cried desperately: "I never had time! I never had time! I've been adored, Anna; admired so. It took up my time. A woman is awfully happy just filling her life with adoration and admiration."

"Oh, Lucia, don't think I can't understand!"

"I know you understand, dear, or I couldn't tell you. Anna, when I said one day there comes a shock——"

"Has anything horrible happened, Lucia?" Anna asked tenderly.

Lucia's throat contracted and her face worked and her breath came hard, so that for a few moments she could not speak. She twined her hands together and wrung them.

"I've been living in a fool's paradise, and I wouldn't look out of it, Anna. I didn't dare. I—I've been in love. I—I've thought I was in love before—with Freddy; and I was awfully fond of Robert, really; but—but—this—it's half killed me."

Anna knew in a flash, so she said, "You mean—Paul Bobby?"

Lucia nodded.

"He isn't worthy," said Anna after a pause.

"Oh, but I loved him! And—and it seemed to me that he was devoted."

"Oh, Lucia, did it really?" cried Anna disbelievingly, but with deep compassion.

"How do I know?" Lucia gasped. "Perhaps it didn't really; perhaps all the time I knew; but I didn't want

to know, nor to see. Oh, I tried so hard—so hard! I who've had men fairly breaking their necks to please me! I tried to make him care! You remember talking of him up here a while ago?"

Anna remembered.

"You suggested marrying him."

"I asked him. I asked him yesterday! And again to-night!"

Anna stifled the cry of astonishment and pain that rose to her lips. She waited and let Lucia hurry on. Lucia continued, tripping over her words, in desperate haste now to tell all her own abasement.

"I thought he would be glad, Anna. I imagined how I could have helped him on—helped him every way. Of course, people would have said he had married me for my money; that wouldn't have mattered. Oh, Anna, I was prepared—expecting to be so happy! I want love! I want it again! Not brotherly love nor sisterly love nor platonic love nor the love of all mankind that preachers are so fond of holding up as the ideal—but a lover's love such as I've had before! I wanted it! I wanted to give him everything too; a home such as he'd never had before; money; for the first time in my life I wanted to give all I had to a man. And I asked him yesterday, and again to-night," she repeated. "He refused!"

"Refused?"

"Refused!"

They both sat looking into the fire, Anna to avoid looking into Lucia's face, Lucia as if trying to conjure up to her own agony the picture of herself and Bobby.

"He was contemptuous. I knew it. I felt it. Surely he didn't mean me to see it—his contempt? He couldn't have been so cruel!"

"I would not have thought," said Anna, seething with contempt for Paul, "that he could have afforded to let you see it."

Lucia replied, very low, "He has a splendid five-year

contract with a film firm and leaves England almost at once."

"Ah!"

"I offered to go with him. But he doesn't want me."

"You offered——"

"I would have followed him over the world."

As the fragile little thing, burning with her own wasted emotions, sat there, so simply saying these things as she stared into the fire, a vast pity rose in Anna, swamping all her vision, all her judgments. She just folded Lucia tighter in her arms and said nothing. She did not condemn Paul Bobby and his kind; she did not lament Lucia's weakness. She uttered no word at all. She could not.

"The milk must be cold," Lucia said at last.

They bestirred themselves and drank it. The little silver clock on the mantelpiece chimed one.

It was already morning.

"And now, Lucia?" Anna half whispered.

For Lucia was looking stronger; very white, but resigned and almost happy. Instead of answering Anna she moved to her telephone.

"He might be asleep," she said.

"Who, Lucia? Not—Paul Bobby? You wouldn't——"

"Father Bernard," said Lucia, with a little smile touching her lips.

"Father Bernard, Lucia?"

"An Anglician priest who used to talk to me, Anna, about all sorts of things. I used to have him here now and again. He was a bit of a craze among the women I know. But when he knew he was a craze he stopped coming. 'Send for me when you want me, child,' he said, 'and I'll come.' And now——"

Lucia waited a little while at the telephone till an answer came. Anna stood and listened and watched. She heard Lucia say, "To-morrow morning, father, as early as you can. Good-night and thank you." The conversation ended.

"He was asleep," said Lucia, turning to Anna again. "But he woke to answer my call. I think he would always wake to answer any call. I wonder," she murmured to herself, "if he knew that it must come?"

"Lucia, tell me more. What are you doing?"

"I must lean on someone, something, Anna," said Lucia. "I have never leaned on myself. Father Bernard once said that to me. 'Learn to lean on yourself if you can,' he said—but I can't, Anna—' by and by other people will fail you, one by one. By and by there will be only God.' He assures me, Anna, he promises me, that God is there."

Anna Land stood dumb, looking at her little sister, and the years seemed to fall from Lucia, so that she was a child again; not the greedy young girl whom baby Anna remembered; not the sophisticated youthful beauty; but back farther than that, into long-ago lands where Anna had never seen her, she went to recapture what she had lost.

"It is too late for you to go home, Anna," said Lucia. "Sleep here; the spare room is always ready. And in the morning Marie can fetch your things. Say good-night."

"I'll stay here, Lucia—I'll brush your hair."

"I'd rather be alone," said Lucia.

They kissed and parted. And quite early next morning, on her way out, Anna met the priest coming upstairs, a man with a divine and ugly face, and eyes that looked as if they beheld and anointed the scars of all the world. As he passed Anna she felt quieter, happier about Lucia. She felt as if his coming blessed the whole restless house.

XX.

King Garnet rolled over on the grass, rubbed his eyes and looked up at the blue sky of a vivid May morning through the arch of green boughs that hung over him. The park was quiet, green, fresh, dewy. Summer dust had not yet blown in upon it; winter's frosts were over. It was so beautiful, so quiet, that he did not much mind the nights there; only the dews were still heavy, and there was no way of drying his clothes save by the heat of his slightly shivering body. The nights were not so bad, when in the kind dark a man dropped and slept where he fell, forgetting the gnawings of his stomach; but the days were hell; so long, so hungry, so empty, so hopeless.

A wave of trade depression and unemployment had rolled over the whole country. He had many companions, who stirred and moaned and growled in their sleep, drawing as far as they could away from each other, couched in the shelter of bushes or tree-trunks; all dreading and hating the dawn.

King Garnet had ceased to wonder at them or meditate upon them. He existed; they existed; the world went on. And, like those other slightly shivering sleepers, he saw nothing coming to him.

He lay on his back and looked up at the blue sky through the green leaves. There was no wind; it was warm, with a little mist, and a promise of precocious heat. He meant to go presently and dip in the cold Serpentine, which wound like a quiet silver snake through the beautiful ways of the great park, and then to rub himself dry on the grass like a dog.

He chewed blades of grass, enjoyed the flavour, spat them out and took fresh mouthfuls. He had nothing to eat, and had eaten nothing since mid-day yesterday, when

he ran after a taxi-cab with luggage on it, and lifted the luggage down at its destination and carried it up three flights of stairs for sixpence. He bought bread and cheese.

From newspapers people sometimes left on the park seats he gleaned his news, and he had gathered that Lady Mabel Conway was in town again. She had arrived for the season. Lady Mabel's arrival implied, of course, his mother's. When he had read of Mabel's return he wrote to Maddox, sending an unstamped envelope, and writing on a telegraph form with a post-office pencil, saying :

> If my mother comes to see you about me, kindly tell her I've gone abroad. All my thanks for all you've done —don't know what it is, I'm sure.
>
> Yours, KING GARNET.

And he hoped that would end the matter and appease his mother's comfort-loving conscience.

Mabel's charity !

" Let's die decently first ; I can't prevent her burying me in a rich coffin if the body's identified," he thought, browsing on the grass.

He could still smile at things, and he laughed at that out loud, so that the nearest sleeper rolled over and opened a red-rimmed eye. " Seen sumthin' funny, mate ? " he growled.

" It's all damn funny when you come to think of it," King replied.

" Not as I see," said the other derelict, and he laid his head upon his arms again and lay very still ; so still that at first King Garnet turned from him and left him alone. But presently the stillness was so supreme, so deadly, that he turned over again and said, " Tell us."

" I'm tired o' tellin'," the other whimpered with an oath.

" But not tired of being believed, eh ? " said Garnet.

The other stared at him.

" No," he muttered. " There's sumthin' in that. All

rogues an' liars an' sneak thiefs, ain't we, dreckly the soles drops off our boots. We're judged by our boots; strike me, if we ain't! Our boots and our beards! 'Ow kin I get shaved? I ain't got the price, an' don't see no likeli'ood o' getting it neither."

"Well, tell us," said King.

The pitiful thing lay and whined out a story that would have been disbelieved if he had told it in the streets or to a charity mission; but King Garnet knew that it might easily be true. He knew that every incredible word of it was probably bare fact, embroidered by no beggar's artifice, no cunning and no crookedness.

When the teller had told his tale, he lay and cried.

"Wish I could help you," said Garnet. "I'm cleaned out."

"Wouldn't be 'ere if you w-w-wasn't," the other snivelled.

"I should not," said King Garnet.

"You don't seem too darn sorry about it, though. Might a'most like it."

"Don't like it, old pal; but I own it's taught me something. If I thought I'd come through on the right side I'd be glad I'd been here."

"You would, eh? You been a sort of swell, eh?"

"I've been a rich man," said Garnet contemplatively.

It seemed a long while ago, and made him smile; and his mouth watered to think of it.

"Eh?" said the derelict, and shot him a malevolent glance. In a tone of weak, raucous anger he cried, "I'm bloody glad you're 'ere! And this ain't the last ditch, neither, lemme tell you. 'N' I 'ope you rots in that last ditch, you—rich—man!"

He dropped on his side again, and rolled over to refuse further communion.

"Dare say you're glad," said Garnet, and he lay placidly chewing grass.

He knew these days that the classes were at each other's throats, and that the actual brutality of the top dog to

the under dog paled before the contemplated brutality of the under dog should ever he struggle on top.

He lay and thought: "No wonder! No wonder! Oh, God! No wonder! It is not a matter of specific concessions or of raising wages a shilling here and a shilling there to stop their shouting. It isn't a matter of scientific strike-breaking, and law and police and armies. The world is wrong at the heart."

He looked around him with the open eyes of a man for whom living had been whittled down to a matter of less than the barest necessities. His eyes were open to see incredible simplicities; to see great big horrors and know they were daily life; but to see great big rough love, too, and to know it was daily food. And he saw and heard the little things also; the sounds of many little griefs from the submerged that he had never considered before; and many little sounds of laughter, too, that he had never known till now. He tore off the comfortable hypocrisies that cushioned his class, and he saw all things raw, before they were dressed for the palates of the rich.

He looked again presently at his neighbour and saw his sore toes protruding through the hard and broken remnants of boots lashed together miraculously with twine.

"Got sore feet?" he remarked.

The other grunted a hostile assent. Garnet sat up and unlaced his own sorry boots. He took off his socks—his last pair—of fine soft wool, and threw them over.

"Have my socks," he said. "Washed 'em yesterday in the Serpentine. Tolerably clean."

The derelict rolled over and stared at him malevolently and grabbed the socks.

Boots in hand, King Garnet went over the grass to the shining water. He undressed on the bank and plunged in, the first swimmer. Save for its surreptitious guests, still sleeping their uneasy slumber, the park was empty. He swam slowly, conserving his strength, remembering not to do enough to tire himself, there being no breakfast to

follow. He dried himself on the grass under the pale sun, like a dog, with all a dog's delight.

He lay and lazed most of that day, his stomach aching for food—but the pangs not too sharp so long as he exerted himself but little—and he thought of Anna Land. It was the day after her concert. He watched a fat man on a seat reading a morning paper, and hoped it would be left. It was. The fat man tossed it down, rose and walked away. King Garnet took it, and retiring to the middle of a great green space where children played, sat with his back against a tree and read :

> Miss Anna Land delighted a large and fashionable audience last night at the Queen's Hall. The young singer, who already has many friends and admirers in musical circles, has a most beautiful personality, and, in her golden-tissue gown, received salvos of applause before she had sung a note. She has a mezzo-soprano voice of extraordinary power, range and flexibility, and an exquisite tone. She sang first the Barcarolle of Hoffmann. . . .
>
> We understand that several contracts were offered her last night. Miss Land, however, will probably appear for the next year or so under the ægis of Signor Marini, who declares her to be the most brilliant beginner in Europe at the present time.

About six o'clock King Garnet rose and made his way slowly through the park towards the Corner. He had eaten nothing at all that day, but with any luck expected to scrape up a meal before he slept. At six o'clock the early theatre dinner traffic began. There was a steady chance for finding cabs, opening doors, or sometimes of keeping an eye on a car while its driver-owner dined.

He went towards the Row, where a few people were riding, and beside which a few people walked leisurely. He was about to cross it when he saw, coming towards him

from his right, strolling leisurely through the perfect evening before going home to dress for dinner, a slim young man of unusual elegance.

It was Paul Bobby. He was accompanied by an older man; not Silver Garnet. This man was older than Silver, rounder, harder, wide-awake and alert to a degree that expressed itself in his walk, the manner of his talk, the carriage of his big head.

King Garnet did not know him. But as he saw Paul Bobby his brain suddenly felt as heavy as his body felt light; a deadly excitement of resentment took him. He turned aside, stopped and stood clean in the two men's way. They both looked at him swiftly, and Paul Bobby's eyes flickered a startled warning. King Garnet heeded not that warning.

He remarked, "Good evening, sir." For he did not even know Bobby's name.

Bobby hesitated, nodded and would have drawn his companion on.

But Garnet moved again in front of them as they stepped aside, and said, "No, sir. A word with you, if you please."

Bobby paused a long time. His hand went to his pocket and back again. His eyes narrowed.

"Get out!" he said. "I've—er—helped you once. I can do nothing more."

"Is the feller begging, Paul?" the bigger man asked.

"Yes," said Bobby. "Come, my man, move on. Let us alone."

King Garnet looked at him steadfastly.

"I haven't had a meal since yesterday mid-day."

"Go to the workhouse or one of the charitable shelters and see if you can stick 'em for a meal," the bigger man advised.

King Garnet laughed. He felt rather light-headed, but amazingly clear-headed at the same time.

"No, sir," he replied with faint mockery. "I rely on this gentleman." And he thought: "I s'pose this is polite blackmail. Oh, Lord! But the price of a meal won't hurt the little swine!"

"Man seems to know you, Paul," said his friend.

Paul Bobby murmured something in his ear that made the big man start, and his eyes livened and fixed cautiously on King Garnet.

He said, "Is that so? Come, then, Paul, don't be a fool. I'm in on this." Roughly he ordered Garnet, "Come and sit over on those chairs under the trees with us and I'll have a word with you."

King Garnet followed the sulky Bobby and the solid man to a green place where a group of unoccupied chairs were placed under trees.

"I've got to sit down," he said suddenly, "small credit as I'll be to you, gentlemen," and he sank suddenly on one of the chairs, sick with hunger.

They saw him very pinched about the lips and nostrils, and pale.

"Y' know, Ogilvey——" said Paul Bobby, beginning to talk whisperingly in the other's ear.

Ogilvey growled. Then turning to Garnet he said in a rough voice, "Look here, young fellow, you can't find any work here, eh? I thought not. Go abroad—go to Canada. Go out West—more scope. The city's overcrowded."

"And you two'd like to be rid of me," Garnet calculated aloud.

"Rubbish!" said Bobby. "What do you matter to me, anyway? I'm through with you."

"If I cast myself on my brother's charity——" King began, watching the boy's dark face.

"His brother!" Ogilvey exclaimed.

Paul Bobby muttered an aside to him.

"Life's queer!" Ogilvey appreciated. "Make a point in a film one day, Paul. Eh? Shan't forget it."

"You," said Paul Bobby to King—"you leave your

half-brother alone and he'll leave you alone. If you don't he'll hand you over to the police. That's dead sure. He's only keeping his hands off you by a big effort and my well-meant advice. Understand that ! "

" And if I go down you go too," Garnet retaliated.

" Come, Paul ! " said Ogilvey, expostulating. And he bent a powerful look on the starved young man before him. " Now, you, my poor good fellow, listen ! You don't do any good talking to us like this. Get that. But we can do you a little good, you know, and I'm not the man to grudge a little help to a fellow-creature. You're breaking your arrangement with Mr. Bobby here by accosting him as you've done. However, you're hungry ; you're in a tight corner. Far's I'm concerned you're forgiven."

King said a little hazily, dazed again by the efforts his brain was making. " You can't do anything but forgive me. I've got you——"

" No, you fool," said Ogilvey, " the under dog has never got the top dog, and you can't reverse our positions. Now, can you ? Look at you ! I ask you ! Be sensible ! Pull yourself together ! You are cleaned out ? "

" I haven't eaten since——"

" Ah, so you said. Now ! Like to go abroad where there is work ? "

" Find me work here."

" No," said Ogilvey, and he set his bulldog face. There was no quarter there.

" You want to get rid of me ; I'm a bit of a danger knocking around," King stated slowly. " Well——"

" You'll go abroad ? "

Many things came blurredly into King Garnet's head ; chief and most agonising, the thought of Anna Land. Thousands of miles of land and ocean separating him from Anna, and how on earth——

Yet how on earth would he ever get near her again, this way ?

A little pride still upheld him, so that he wished to hide himself from her until he could come as a man who fought a winning battle.

To Ogilvey, watching with his little bulldog eyes screwed up, he nodded.

Ogilvey slid his hand into his pocket and brought out five shillings, which he handed to Garnet across the sullen and rigid form of Paul Bobby.

"Supper and breakfast for you. Not a bob more. No, not a penny till you comply with my conditions; or rather I should prefer to say, till you take my advice."

"Sounds nicer; better bit of humbug," King Garnet commented faintly. And in his pockets his fingers turned around the coins.

"To-morrow morning early a steerage passage'll be booked for you on a boat that'll sail next day," said Ogilvey. "If I say so, it will be done. What name are you giving?"

"Johnson," said Bobby, answering for him.

"Johnson," Ogilvey continued. "Call at my office to-morrow, 36 Robert Street, give your name, and you'll be handed another five bob and your rail ticket for next day. Morning after that, call for your steamship ticket to Canada and another five bob, in time to catch the boat train. When you're aboard you'll find ten pounds for you in charge of the purser. Get me?"

"Absolutely," said King Garnet, heaving to his feet like a man drunk. "I'll be getting along for some grub now."

"Don't spend it all at once," said Paul Bobby sardonically.

King Garnet turned and swayed over the youth.

"Before I go I'd d-d-dearly like the p-p-pleasure of lamming the life out of you," he began in a faint voice that stammered from sheer weakness.

"Go along, you fool!" Ogilvey commanded.

King Garnet went along.

They sat and watched him padding over the grass towards the Corner, till he merged into a stream of pedestrians and passed from sight.

"That's a man I'd like to get out of the country!" said Ogilvey. "I told you at the time, when I knew exactly what you'd done, that you ought to have seen to it, Paul."

Bobby nodded.

"Careless, I admit."

"Fellows are queer," said Ogilvey. "If I'd given him fifteen bob all at once he might have felt rich and decided not to go. But five bob at a time, eking it out like that, and then the ten pound aboard ship like a carrot in front of the donkey's nose—you see the psychology of it, Paul?"

"Oh, ah, I see."

"Besides," said Ogilvey, "calling at the office to report himself, as it were—I'd like to keep an eye on him, hanged if I wouldn't! Come! We must get on." King Garnet filled himself with coarse food and slept like a top that night under the stars. When he called at Robert Street next morning Ogilvey himself saw him, and handed him his further dole. Now Ogilvey was suave and obliging. He gave him a handful of cigarettes and adopted a friendly tone.

"Not brought up to work, my boy, eh? And no talents, eh? Well, get out of it! Get out of it! And when you get over see what you can find. I'd go right up to the Yukon and just try my luck. I would! A young single chap——"

"Yukon?" said Garnet, smiling. "Death trap, isn't it? Suicides, murders, failures, eh?"

"And millionaires made overnight!" cried Ogilvey, slapping him on the back, his tone jovial but his eyes cold. "Make a dash for it! Try an adventure or two! You've a big world before you yet!"

On the morrow King Garnet sailed for Canada with ten pounds in his pocket, one of Ogilvey's old suits of clothes

and a change of linen from the same source tied up in a bundle, and his heart fixed feverishly on far gold fields.

He thought: "Yes, make a dash for it. I will. It's quick or never for me—quick or never."

He was afraid, and owned it to himself in his rocking berth at nights, of the toy of success that he had put gaily and proudly and freely into his beloved's oblivious hands.

Ogilvey said to Bobby, "There goes a man who'll never come back."

XXI.

On the very day that King Garnet sailed, Anna was sitting with Lucia again in her rose-coloured bedroom; and Marie, with tearful eyes, came in and out to fetch the beautiful clothes from cupboard and wardrobe and drawer to fill the trunks which she was packing in an adjoining room. The heavenly sun of a May day streamed through the open window; and also there entered, familiar and friendly, the thousand little sounds of the town. The window boxes were filled with rows of hyacinths, whose sweet, heavy smell stole to the two women within. There were roses as usual—Ivinghoe's—on the dressing-table, a silver tea tray on the satin fender-stool and a litter of invitation cards on Lucia's little rosewood desk in the corner.

Yet all was changed. Anna sat and looked at Lucia almost in awe; Lucia, who was at peace; from whose face the tired lines were smoothing away; whose eyes were restful; who said thankfully that she now slept of nights.

"Oh, Lucia," said Anna, fearful for Lucia as she was never fearful for herself, "are you sure?"

Lucia smiled.

"Are you sure," Anna hurried, "that you can do it? Endure it forever? That it isn't just a phase, a respite, Lucia? You, who've so loved the world and all your toys, my dear, do you truly realise that you're giving up everything for ever?"

"And gaining so much, Anna," said Lucia.

"When did you finally decide, my dear?"

"Yesterday," said Lucia. "I talked it all out with Father Bernard. I've been to see the convent; I've talked with the mother superior; I've seen all they're doing, Anna. It isn't an inward life, as thoughtless people suppose. It's an outward life. They visit the sick; they nurse and work and teach; and they give all they have to the poor—all things very new to me, dear. And I see they are splendid. If I learn to give enough I may even be splendid myself one day."

"Oh, Lucia! I shall lose you!"

"No, no, my dear, never! We shall write to each other; think of each other; see each other sometimes. I shan't be idling here, with nothing to do and nowhere to go except to people who don't really want me. That'll be all the difference."

"You've loved clothes so much, Lucia."

"All mine are going to a private society, which will distribute them to young actresses who are very hard up and yet must make a good appearance. It's a good way to dispose of them. I have some lovely things, Anna."

"Oh, Lucia!"

"Is there anything at all that you would like, Anna, before I sell my jewellery?"

"Nothing at all, darling."

"I bring all my money to the convent, of course. Now it will be used beautifully, to the last penny."

"Have you told anyone, Lucia?"

Lucia shook her head.

"Whom have I to tell, Anna? Nobody cares but you."

"Lord Ivinghoe, perhaps?"

"He does not care," said Lucia with a smile.

"Marie cares, Lucia," Anna said quickly, thinking of the Frenchwoman's tearful eyes.

"She loses a good job, my dear."

Anna held Lucia's hand in a long silence. Then: "Lucia, when——"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow, Lucia? Oh, no!"

"To-morrow I enter the novitiate, and in three years' time I will take the veil. My way is all just carved out for me now, Anna, and I haven't a thought, a wish, a sorrow or a struggle. That is how the mother superior explained it all to me. 'You will just serve,' she said. The most marvellous and lovely old woman, Anna."

Anna got up and paced the room. She looked into the other room, where Marie was packing gown after gown; and cascades of lovely chiffon lingerie hung about everywhere, on chair backs and couch.

"It is like death," she said, coming back.

Lucia sat still in her usual chair, her usual rose-silk pillows behind her.

"It is life, my dear."

"Have you truly thought carefully enough, Lucia?"

Lucia nodded.

"Several times in my life, Anna, I've known a woman do much as I am doing; enter a religious order and lose herself so that her world never found her again. And I've smiled with the others and said 'Poor Dolores'—there was one called Dolores—or 'Poor Moira'—I remember a girl, a Moira Silman, doing it. 'She's awfully embittered,' we said. 'How sad!' We didn't know, my dear, we didn't know. I don't know now all that I shall know by and by. But the greatest dedication one can make could not possibly be bitter or sad. There's something glorious about it; privately glorious; that one feels in one's own heart. Giving all one has to give is surely worth doing. 'Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor.'"

On a note of rapture Lucia's voice died. Anna went to her and knelt beside her.

"This is good-bye, then, Lucia, for a long time. I go next week."

"You're going to sing in Rome, in Milan, in Berlin, in Paris, in opera, under Marini?"

"I have a year's contract abroad, Lucia. Then I come back to London to sing at Covent Garden."

"All you ever wanted," said Lucia with a dreaming smile. "Take it, Anna, and be very happy. Be as happy as I am. You can't be more." And she whispered good-bye like an amen.

On the day that King Garnet left England, and Lucia and Anna had that farewell talk in the little incense-filled house, Silver Garnet sat at tea in Mabel Conway's drawing-room. Mrs. Garnet had received with regretful protestations his promise of a thousand a year allowance, and had gone away to rest before dinner. But still Lady Mabel and Silver sat on in the long green room with the teacups between them.

Silver admired Mabel extremely. She was so wonderful in that she believed all he said. She believed in him, at his bidding, as much as he believed in himself. She was satisfying, and she listened. She was going to be a countess in her own right—when the tuberculous brother died—and yet she listened with interest to Silver Garnet talking about himself.

It confirmed him in his view that Silver Garnet was a pretty big man, with a great big iron character that radiated from him like the rays of a powerful lamp, or how could he so mesmerise this little aristocrat?

"I'm going into the city," he said. "I intend to make money. I know some people would say I have plenty, and I suppose I have for an unambitious man. But I am not an unambitious man, and in my poor opinion money should breed. That's what it's for. I will tell you

between ourselves, I am going in for copper. A short while ago I nearly went into another big thing; but circumstances arose, and I didn't. When I say 'circumstances' I mean enemies, of course. A man like me," he romanced, "naturally has enemies. I think I could surprise you, dear lady, if I were to tell you a few tales about that. In fact, I'm sure I could surprise you. Fact is I mustn't tell. I'm not a talker.

"But copper—you may take it from me that there is shortly going to be about the biggest boom in copper that has been known for years. However, I mustn't bore you with business things that you can't possibly understand. Tell me, what do you like doing?"

"I think I like everything," said Lady Mabel a little vaguely; and indeed she did.

"I love to hear a woman say so," Silver announced; "quite a relief in these days when women have so many fads and fancies. Most women make so many demands and complaints if everything doesn't just suit 'em." He was nursing wrath with Anna, but Mabel did not know that. "Fond of dancing, eh?"

"Oh, very," she assented.

"Good!" said Silver. "You must dance with me one night, will you?"

"I'll be charmed."

"Keen on polo, of course?"

He had been taking anxious steps towards becoming a member at Ranelagh and Hurlingham.

"I try to see all the polo," said Lady Mabel in the tone of one hardily practising a virtue.

"Good!" Silver announced again. "Must let me drive you down; you and Mrs. Garnet. Eh?"

"We'll be charmed—one day," said Lady Mabel.

"She staying with you all the sum—all the season, eh?"

"I hope so," said little Mabel, turning her devotional eyes up to Silver's pleased face. "I am so fond of her."

"I hope you'll allow me to call sometimes; must look after my stepmother," Silver proceeded, more and more pleased.

He had already lunched here with the two women, and this afternoon he had called uninvited.

"I hope," Mabel replied, "that we shall see a good deal of you."

"I shall take some shooting for the autumn, of course," said Silver. "You'll both have to come and stay with me, eh? My stepmother'll play hostess, no doubt, if I persuade her to. She—she knows a lot of people, I suppose?"

"Oh, of course," said Mabel.

"It isn't of course at all, me lady," Silver thought rather grimly. "I haven't collected many worth the trouble so far."

But his mind, always heatedly ahead of his actions, already seized upon this idea of an autumn house-party in Yorkshire or Scotland. If copper behaved as he considered likely he would rent a moor, with Lady Mabel Conway and Mrs. Garnet picking and attracting desirable guests.

"Hunt at all?" he added.

"Oh, I couldn't miss a season!" said Lady Mabel.

"My word!" Silver thought. "She takes some keeping up with."

But he meant to keep up with her, now he had found her; and strangely enough, the more difficulties her acquaintance imposed upon him the more he respected and admired her.

She was now remarking in that pretty, uncertain way of hers: "Aren't you a socialist, Mr. Garnet? I'm sure I've heard so."

Silver's eyes bulged a little.

"I have studied social problems quite a bit," he said rather heavily, "and in some ways my theories have at times coincided with the more advanced ideas on social-

ism. But I'd looked only at things from one side then ; now I've had opportunity of studying closely both sides ; and it makes a difference. Some men won't change their views. Convince 'em they're wrong, they're ashamed to alter. I am not that sort of man, Lady Mabel. I have delivered a good many addresses at—at socialist meetings ; and I have studied matters fair and square from both sides—after all, what is fair and square if that isn't ?—and I say this : That socialism's one-sided. Very. Out for personal advantages. It wouldn't work out. Never, never, never, Lady Mabel, would socialism work out ! "

" Then," said Lady Mabel, " you won't be putting up for Labour at any of the bye-elections, Mr. Garnet ? I somehow imagined——"

" Me a Labour candidate ! " Silver cried. " Dear lady, you haven't got my politics right at all. Let me tell you——"

At some length he told Lady Mabel, till dusk crept into the green drawing-room and the footman came to remove teacups, while Silver still sat oblivious of time. Lady Mabel listened. His rabid earnestness impressed her ; she believed him ; his contradictions she did not notice ; his pressing attention warmed the thin blood in her veins. Few men sought out Mabel. She hung on Silver's words and decided to defend him against the barbed shafts which some of her friends would direct at him.

Silver left at last, not so much because he was tired of talking or because he thought Mabel could be tired of listening, but because he had a dinner appointment. It was with Anna Land.

Anna and Silver had dined together at the Charlton. Ferrugi had come to compliment and congratulate and say a regretful au revoir to his beautiful singer. Many people recognised and bowed to her. Special flowers were on her table. She now shed lustre on Silver rather than his shedding lustre on her.

That situation did not altogether please him. At heart he had a little canker. True, he liked to be seen in public with important people, with aristocratic people, or with decorative women; and Anna was most decorative to-night; but he was sore at their respective positions thus falling into such allotment. With Anna he had been the host and patron always in his own mind. He still wished to be the patron. He would have liked to patronise protectively this beautiful thing. And when he saw the glances of recognition and admiration, the attention of the great Ferrugi, and noted that Anna was the attraction at his table, rather than that romantic, impressive, dominating person, Silver Garnet, he suffered a slight shock of incredulous vexation. The Charlton's special floral tribute to her angered him. He felt himself on the edge of a background that he certainly did not intend to occupy. Therefore he thundered and lightened, which he did with impunity these rich days. He raised his voice and insulted Ferrugi, and bullied every waiter literally within sight or hearing. From Ferrugi the insults dropped as water from the oily back of a duck. He answered with placations; the waiters bowed, apologised for nothing at all, and smiled on Anna.

Anna was so radiant—if still grave with the shadow of parting with Lucia—that it seemed as if every other woman in the great rose-coloured restaurant paled to insignificance beside her. She had arrived in these few months of waxing prosperity to full beauty. The gloss on her hair was like the gloss on the wing of a raven; and her eyes, so big and bright, shone, full of visions. She had seemed as if she walked on air to their table; she sat there bright with glad dreams. Her hands were now manicured as flawlessly as Lucia's had ever been, her body was sheathed in silk as fine. She had no sumptuous furs or jewels, yet never seemed to lack them. Her youth and beauty cloaked and adorned her.

All through the dinner Silver eyed her with increasing

passion ; all through the dinner he quarrelled with her and bullied her and made love to her. He forgot the anæmic Mabel entirely ; in fact, he had forgotten her as soon as he stepped outside the house on his way home to dress for Anna ; and all the way there, and then to the Charlton, he had thought only of Anna. She eluded him ; she went to Rome and Milan, Berlin, and Paris ; and if he could have seen her down and put his foot on her neck, he would have put it there. He ached that she should be thrown down and kept there for him to salve.

She told him of Lucia ; he told her of Mrs. Garnet, of Lady Mabel Conway and of Bobby's fine contract. He tried to fill her ears with big talk of financial affairs, and to pose as a money-maker of acumen and repute. He said he had already got the City with its ear to the ground, listening for his footsteps. They both dreaded and admired him. The cooler Anna kept, the quieter remained her eyes, the hotter he grew ; and his fancy flew higher, trying to bring down hers. Only the total surrender of her mind would have satisfied him to-night.

He talked on ; and when other diners had thinned out to inconsiderable numbers they still remained at their table. She sympathised with his plans and extolled his ambitions ; but he could not get from her the dumb and undiscerning flattery that he read in Lady Mabel's devotional eyes.

All the while, as they talked of others, he sensed that she longed to ask him if he knew of King. He vowed to himself that he would not have answered ; and as if she knew it she let the topic alone. A deadly mood fell upon him. He felt thwarted.

At last she rose, gathering round her the black velvet cloak which had been one of the purchases of her first modest prosperity, and said she must go home. He followed her out, dangerous ; and still dangerous, shepherded her into the limousine. He gave her humble

address to his chauffeur and flung himself beside her with a sound of rage.

"Why don't you leave that wretched hole and live in comfort, my girl, as you could?"

"My landlady was good to me in the old days, Silver, and now I'd like to be good to her for a short while in the new."

"Pshaw! That isn't the way to go through life! When'll you be a woman? A true woman doesn't go in for high nonsense like that. She just grabs all the little luxuries she can obtain, and quite right too! What are women for?"

"I don't think you've ever known."

"Eh? Known?"

"What women are for."

He laughed.

"Come here, Anna." He flung an arm about her. "Kiss me." He kissed her by brutal force—a long kiss of anger.

She flamed at him, and they literally fought in the limousine. He tried to hold her to him and to make love; whether from a passion of anger or a passion of affection, his head was too muddled to care. All he knew was that with Anna he had no success; that he could bully servants, boast to men, buy the favours of women, and yet could not touch Anna Land. She eluded him.

The chauffeur had driven on, immobile, though the thick glass of the wind screen probably reflected dimly something of what went on behind him; and now he drew up before Anna's home in the mean street.

With an exclamation of disgust Silver realised their destination and let her go. She went straight to her front door, latch-key ready, opened it in an instant, and would have shut it again as swiftly, only that his foot was over the threshold.

"Go back!" she flamed.

"I won't!" said Silver. "I will come in! Come, go

on! You can't have public scenes. Does a woman no good."

She ran up the stairs and Silver followed hard behind, his hat still on the back of his head. He had been so angry in the car that he had kissed her with his hat on.

Realising his lack of manners on the way upstairs only increased his temper, and he flung the hat, which now offended him as much as it had offended Anna, very violently on her table. Inside the room, she swung round to face him.

"Now, Silver Garnet, get out, and stay out!"

"So you say now, dear girl, when you see yourself on the edge of getting all you want; when you can find your backers by lifting up your little finger."

"I have no backers!"

"If you have no backers you're a fool! You're no true woman to muck your chances. A true woman is an opportunist. All the better for men. We don't mind making the opportunities. Ah, you look at me now as if you'd like to kill me with your scornful eyes, Anna; but not so long ago you were glad of me; you ate my dinners; you sat in my theatre seats; you—led me on; you——"

"Will you go, Silver?"

"You shall be glad of me one day again, Anna. Yes, you shall! You call yourself an honest woman, never giving a man anything you don't want to give. Well, let me tell you you're no true woman."

"For the third time!" she laughed, heated with scorn.

"Give me softer women, who don't want to behave like ice to a man when he's on fire! Give me a woman who'll pretend a bit then!"

"Go and find them!" Anna cried. "There are plenty."

"There are! There are! But listen! The time shall come, Anna, when you will behave more prettily to me; when you'll pretend like the rest, if I want to; the time shall come when perhaps it won't be pretence with you.

You love me! I say, you love me! Only you won't admit it. These putrid, sickening, unsexed ambitions of yours dominate you now; but wait till you fail! Wait till you fail, I say, and you have to turn to your proper dominator, man; when——"

"Will you get out, Silver?"

Silver clapped his hat on his head, looked at her long and hard, and went out. She locked her door behind him.

She stood quite a long time on her hearth, looking into the empty grate. Like most women, she always imagined a fire in a grate, whatever the weather. She was sorry for all that Silver had become. She pitied him. She saw clearer than he how his new world had pulled its golden veil over his eyes, and when it had got the man properly blindfolded would cheat him up and down its highways, and in and out of every one of its market places. She became suddenly aware that she was staring at bars of cold black iron, and concern with Silver left her. She went to pull her curtains across the window, and looking up, beheld the stars. Under the same stars slept King Garnet, somewhere. But where? Again, because she did not know, because she feared for him, she wept.

XXII.

Then Anna Land walked through the ways of paradise. She entered into her wonderful year, and triumphed. The applause of multitudes was always in her head like the surge of the sea; the adoration of men informed her with the knowledge of the resistless powers of a charming woman; the admiration of a society to which she had never before had entrée seemed to stabilise and secure her. Her voice strengthened, her beauty grew; she added to

her ready mind a store of worldly knowledge and found it good.

In Rome a lovely princess was her friend. In Milan, when she sang, the stage was heaped with flowers; a romantic officer of the Bersaglieri followed her incessantly with his offers of love. She could have married Marini, and did not, to his undying chagrin and surprise. She made a good income, and spent it. That was Marini's advice.

"*Carissima*, you must have clothes. You must have jewels. If you will not accept jewels from men you must buy some for yourself. You must buy something! A prima donna without any jewels is incredible. Grudge yourself nothing. It's an investment that you make. The ease, the peace, the luxury, the beauty of life will cost you dear, but repay you more. Live your life full of colour, my heart," said the sentimental Marini.

The summer flitted by like one golden day. Sometimes she had a few hours to spare. Someone with a high-powered car would be at her disposal. At the end of her season in Milan she had a few days to spare. She found herself a guest on board a ducal yacht, and saw for the first time the sun and the blueness of the Mediterranean. She had taken Marini's advice, and her clothes vied with those of the most exquisite women on board. All the day they were cool and white, these women; all the evenings some mere flame of chiffon sufficed to cover them, with an amazing jewel or two. In this life Anna Land bathed and was radiant. But she preserved her dream.

"I am climbing; I am climbing; and I will stand at the top of the world; and he will come to me."

Sometimes she thought: "He could write a letter. He could! He could! He can find me, but I cannot find him."

Sometimes she thought: "He must fail!"

Sometimes she thought: "He will win!"

But all she really knew of King Garnet was his silence.

Marini said to her one evening, "*Carissima*, is there a man?"

She looked back at Marini in silence, and asked herself poignantly, "Yes; is there a man?"

It was an evening such as happens on the Mediterranean. They were at Naples. She had left the yacht and the dreaming days; Marini had come to her to escort her to Berlin. They sat on the great white stone terrace of a hotel, dining under the stars. The moon was up over the dark blue bay; the air, hot, still and fragrant, had the headiness of wine. Along the white stone terrace many tables were set, with red lamps like fireflies on each. She wore a gown of white chiffon, winking with its crystal embroideries. She felt all over smooth as satin, supple with youth and subtle as a Circe. The heavenly night made her feel like that, and her heart said: "Close your eyes, drift for a moment; and imagine—imagine——"

She imagined briefly that there was a man indeed; that he sat on the other side of that inconsiderable barrier of the table; that he was tall and big, with the muscles of an athlete and the laugh of a boy at play; that his face was the face that had looked into hers beside the binding machines of the Garnet Printing Works; that had looked into hers in the darkness of a little car, in the lighted dance room, across an infinite gulf in a great rose restaurant; that had lain on hers in an agonised happiness for the length of a long kiss.

The Italian spoke again, beseechingly: "Tell me, my beautiful Anna, is there a man?"

And she said slowly, "Yes."

"He is a fortunate one," said Marini. And when she merely smiled, he pressed: "Where is he?"

She had to answer, "I do not know."

All the summer Silver Garnet was plunging farther into the labyrinths where he did not know his way in and from which he could not find his way back. He was a prey for

all the spiders of shady finance, who, when they saw the big fly blundering their way, tempted him in and enmeshed his feet. He lost a hundred thousand pounds by the end of July; that was over copper. He had ordered the building of a racing stable in Berkshire, and the work had been begun, and he had bought a horse or two. But he saw no prospect of selling his freakishly expensive stable except at a grave loss. He wanted to rent that moor in the autumn, and gather about him the kind of people Mabel Conway could attract, and he was still prepared to spend money on it. But he began now to look carefully at his finances—he was spending personally at the rate of ten thousand a year already—then to make frenzied efforts to readjust them, then to be surprised, then to be ill-tempered, then to fear.

About the beginning of August, when London had emptied—or emptied according to his new ideas—came his great crash over jute. Ever since early spring he had been nibbling at a huge jute enterprise; in June he had gone in a whole-hogger; at the beginning of August the company was wound up; and the chief sufferer, for some inexplicable reason that he was only now beginning wrathfully to understand, was Silver Garnet. Other men crawled out, but he was in it up to his neck.

Three days before the twelfth, which was to find him gloriously upon his moor among his guests, he sat with Maddox, and Maddox explained matters.

"Can't I go for 'em?" roared Silver; and Maddox replied coldly, "You can't."

"Then how do I stand?" said Silver. perspiring.

"You've dropped over two hundred thousand pounds since February," said Maddox, looking at his figures. "Dropped it in crazy speculations, Mr. Garnet. No wise man ever speculates on other people's calculations. You'd better have stuck to your inheritance, the printing works. Still, it's too late to cry over that; the milk's spilled. Let us see what we have left.

Maddox pursed his lips over what they had left; and he shook his head, and looked very remonstrantly at Silver.

"We have left," said he, frowning, "something like one hundred thousand pounds. Invested at 5 per cent., which you will scarcely get with safety—and I do not advise you, with your proclivities—I speak frankly, with apologies—to go into anything that isn't safe—your income should reach about five thousand pounds, or something less perhaps. Do not reckon on more. Your income tax on that will be a matter of 25 per cent."

"I shan't have four thousand a year left!" cried Silver.

"You will not. Still, last February, when your income was more like four hundred pounds, that would have seemed a tidy sum, eh?"

"This isn't last February!"

"No; I appreciate it, Mr. Garnet. There has been much water under the bridge since then. However, you can live an adequate bachelor life on between three and four thousand a year. I should sell the big car and drive a little one myself, if I were you. Any garage will give you an estimate for upkeep. I should sell the house and take a nice flat. Then you will be able to afford yourself a little shooting, and run over to Paris, and so on. Talking of shooting, this moor is costing you three thousand pounds, eh?"

"It is."

"Practically your new yearly income."

"Well——"

"What was the estimate for the stable? Let me see—ten thousand pounds. Sell the stable, sub-rent the moor at the best figure you can get and cut your losses," advised Maddox.

Silver perspired.

"But I—I—I've got a big shooting party."

"You have, have you?" said Maddox; and looking dispassionately at Silver, he wondered how he achieved it.

The next moment Silver was explaining: "My step-

mother is acting as hostess, and she and Lady Mabel Conway made a list of guests. A man must have a lady if he entertains."

"Lady Mabel Conway," mused Maddox; "daughter of the late Earl of Aldersley; sister of the present Earl, who isn't going to live next year out, it is said. Girl with about twelve thousand a year of her own; will have fifty—yes."

"Sweet girl, too," said Silver sentimentally. "Very sweet. So womanly."

Maddox eyed him.

"I couldn't give up the shoot this autumn," added Silver earnestly. "It's gone too far."

"Very well," said Maddox. "But I'll sell the stable for you, shall I—and the house?"

"I suppose so," Silver muttered gloomily.

"And the cars?"

"Oh, I'll want 'em both up north, won't I?"

"Dare say you will. Sell one of 'em—the big one—when your shooting party's over. And retrench, my dear sir, retrench! As for servants——"

"I'll want every man jack of 'em up north, shan't I? And there's a whole army of keepers and beaters and what not."

Maddox threw up his hands.

"Very well," he said, "go to ruin your own way."

"I'll pull up directly the shooting party's over."

"My dear sir," said Maddox, "pulling up's the hardest thing in the world. You've learned the easy lesson of spending and squandering. You learned that quick. But this is a different job. You'll mean well, and say to yourself: 'I'll save on this, but I must have that; I'll sell that, but I must keep this.' Now I say to you, sell this and sell that. Sweep clean! Begin again! Two hundred thousand pounds since February!"

Even the lawyer sat aghast. Silver gloomed.

"You spend at the rate of ten thousand a year, too,"

said Maddox. "These figures you have shown me, and that you have asked your bank to show me—we have gone into them and prepared a statement, and you spend at that rate. Shall I tell you the truth?"

"Certainly," said Silver, "if it will help."

"I don't know that it will help," Maddox replied; "but it's this: You don't know how to be a rich man."

Silver rose in what dignity was left to him and went out of the office, mortally offended. His car was at the door—the big limousine, with Jarvis at the wheel.

Silver yapped, "Bruton Street!" and flung himself in.

So he went to Lady Mabel. She was in and alone. Silver went headlong into the long green drawing-room and instantly found balm. Lady Mabel ordered fresh tea, and gave orders that she was at home to no one else.

Silver sat down beside her. She was a very little thing, easy and pliant in mind and body, and she had grown to like him very much indeed. She liked a man who made a noise; it seemed to her weakness so masculine a thing to do. A man who made a noise swayed little Lady Mabel like a rushing wind passing over a slender reed and bending the reed to its will.

She said in her sympathetic way, "You're tired."

"With business," said Silver.

She looked at him as admiringly as she used to look at his half-brother.

"You're so different from most of the men one meets," she mused softly.

Silver sat forward in a declamatory attitude at once.

"I suppose I am. I know I am. Big, rough, brutal, I must seem to you," he said modestly, and his heart swelled. "I've been called a giant. I've been told I'm made of iron. Perhaps I am. I suppose a man like me must be always doing things. Always up and doing things—the bigger the better. I can't be trivial. It isn't my fault; it just isn't in me. But—yes, I suppose it

makes us very different; makes us stand alone very much."

"It makes you stand right out from the ruck," she responded.

"Yes, yes; but we're lonely fellows, my kind."

"The biggest men always are," said Lady Mabel, looking at him devotionally; and she saw in him all she longed to see; what she was always willing and waiting to see—would have been ready to see in any man who wished to let her do so—the essence of dominating courage and palpitating romance.

"That doesn't make up for the loneliness, though."

She looked down, thrilling to the core of her.

Silver went on: "And we take the strain of big things because we can't help ourselves; it's in our nature to do it. But, Mabel—Lady Mabel, I beg your pardon——"

"No," she said, "Mabel. I like it, from my—my friends."

The cockles of Silver's heart became warm and glowing.

"I was going to say, the strain of big things is a big strain. It fairly batters at one sometimes. I've had a bad week."

"Oh! Misfortunes?"

He could not confess to her failure, misfortune or anything so ignominious. He left her frail female mind to assimilate whatever it found most suitable; and waving a hand largely, said: "Oh, don't let's call things that. It's weak, and I hate weakness. I have no place for it at all in my composition! I've had a week of strain—great responsibilities. I may lose, I suppose; but I'll win again. Why I don't keep it to myself, I don't know. It's too hard for your little head, my dear."

The words "my dear" slipped out of Silver patronisingly; but when he had spoken them he instantly realised that they might have a meaning. The meaning and all that it might imply to so simple a woman, all such accepted

implication might mean to him at this especial disastrous juncture, had only just entered his head like a streak of light, when Mabel stretched out her hand. He took it on the wave of the astounding, the tremendous, the gratifying idea. She faltered.

"S-S-Silver, I sometimes have thought that—that——"

All that Mabel had thought was transparently clear even to so mean a psychologist as Silver Garnet. The miracle of the idea was so overwhelming, his gratification so inordinate, his sense of the picture in which he was participating grew so dramatic—his whole life being to him the most thrilling drama off the movies—that, drawn by that little hand, he just knelt before her and said, "Mabel, will you marry me?"

Even he could hardly believe it. An earl's daughter, and sister of an earl, with twelve thousand a year certain, and a probable fifty; and he—he—Silver Garnet——

The triumph on Silver Garnet's face appeared to Mabel splendid sheer male pride of love and conquest, and she was devastated by it. She slid into his arms, and, nothing loath, he kissed her.

"Lady Mabel Garnet," he thought.

Only half an hour ago he had been with Maddox, a most crestfallen and humbled man; now he was one crescendo of triumph again; and how eagerly he re-established his belief in himself, which Maddox had almost shaken!

He kissed Mabel and crushed her tiny, soft, loving figure in arms that seemed to her—for lack of comparison with other arms—abundantly fine and strong.

In Silver's head ran a clear stream of thought: The moor would be all right now; the stable—yes, perhaps; the cars, certainly; the servants in sufficient quantity could be retained; and the entrée to most exclusive houses would be his. Mabel, the gift-bringer, he approved of and appreciated highly.

For the first time perhaps in his life he made a serious

judgment that was perfectly right. He judged that he could easily make her happy. All the little half-cold, half-pathetic thing yearned for was that some man should take triumphal possession of her and be deified. Silver had no objection to becoming a deity. He liked it, and knew that it was eminently right.

His mind running on the talk with Maddox, he asked her eagerly, "Mabel—when?"

She loved his eagerness, and whispered, "Soon after Christmas, Silver?"

"Not sooner?"

"Oh, Silver! My trousseau! And I have engagements, and you'd like everything done beautifully, Silver, not rushed—not scrambled."

Then Silver said in a lordly way to himself, "By Jove! Yes! Beautifully it shall be done!"

He visioned St. Margaret's, and red carpets and the murmuring smart congregation; and nearer to him, the congratulations of his guests in Yorkshire, when at his own table the engagement should be first announced. Following that would come the announcements in the *Morning Post* and the *Times*, and the meeting with august relations of the future bride, and the paragraphs in society papers, saying:

> Between her days with the Cottesmore hunt, Lady Mabel Conway finds time to run up to town and add to the wonderful trousseau she is collecting for her marriage with Mr. Silver Garnet. She was in Bond Street yesterday, looking radiant, accompanied by her fiancée, who is really becoming the most talked-of man in London. He, of course, is—— And so on.

These gratifications flashed through Silver's mind in a series of pictures; and not being in any particular lover's hurry to link himself with Mabel, he suddenly sensed how he would enjoy the preliminary ceremonial and panoply of

it all. He would revel in every little bit. Still, financial affairs pressed a little—not unduly now, with brilliant prospects ahead. Only they must not be forgotten.

"Very, very early in the spring, then darling," he commanded.

When he left Mabel at last—she could hardly let him go; she was happy and flushed and thrilled to a degree which added to his satisfaction—he walked on air. But in the street, the green drawing-room faded, Mabel's clinging hands had no lingering power, all concerning Mabel was transient; she did not hold a man. He thought of Anna. It was a red thought.

He suddenly realised: "I give her up?"

He had reason to make a detour on his way home, and the car passed the Charlton Restaurant. It was as if Anna were with him. He remembered her sitting in the restaurant with him, slim and splendid. Absent or present, a man could see her. Across sea and across land her magnetism drifted. He did not know where she was, and yet it seemed that she was there. She was one of the unfading, heartbreaking, royal women.

Silver sat upright in the car, his fists clenched on his knee, his teeth clenched upon each other. His mood of triumph became vindictive. He went home and dined alone, his silence punctuated by telephone calls, before she went out, after she came in, seemingly at every available moment, from Lady Mabel.

XXIII.

In November Anna Land lay ill. She was in Paris, her engagement there but begun; her triumphs piled behind her, bouquet upon bouquet. But she was very ill; no longer did she feel splendid, as if she could combat the

world and win on her own terms; the strength was out of her body; typhoid fever poisoned her veins; her brain was mazed; the golden throat was spoiled; her golden voice was gone.

This last calamity Anna did not know for weeks. She had conquered the fever, cleared her brain, and began to remember the year that lay behind her, and to recall that Covent Garden lay before her, when she asked for a mirror and looked into it.

She whispered, startled, "I have been very ill."

"Yes, mademoiselle," said her kindly nurse.

For a long while after she relinquished the mirror Anna lay placid, not thinking more. Wasted and white she had seen herself, with two long black plaits of hair that looked too heavy for the face between; but she felt no fears as yet. Her thoughts ran sluggishly. Then she closed her eyes and slept lightly; in the sleep a dream came to her; in the dream she saw King Garnet looking at her across a great rose gulf; in the dream she opened her mouth and sang to him. She sang:

"Night of stars and night of love,
Fall gently o'er the waters——"

And she awoke to hear her own voice; her poor, thin, tired voice, with the springtime spirit gone from it, all strength gone, the tone rough—all wrong.

She awoke fully, and called "Nurse!" The nurse came.

"My voice!"

"Do not excite yourself, mademoiselle," said the nurse soothingly. "The doctor will be here soon. And it is better for your voice that you rest yourself, keep tranquil."

"Keep tranquil!" Anna Land cried.

"Try! Try!" urged the nurse.

The doctor came.

"My voice!" whispered Anna Land, blanched whiter by her fear than illness had left her.

He was kind and unsatisfactory.

Marini came, sympathetic, indeed, but very vague, glad to get away. His consolation, reassurances, were stupidly done. He conveyed nothing but disaster.

Anna Land counted up the spare cash which the fever had left her, and consulted throat specialists till the money was spent.

They said, "Rest, rest; the voice may come back."

She cried, "As it was before?"

One, more honest than the rest, or more callous, answered plainly, "No; never as it was before."

Even so, it must not be used at all for a year; a whole year.

It was not Marini who told Anna that her place at Covent Garden had been filled. He saw that the news filtered through to her; then she wrote and told him that she knew.

Before she left Paris she had sold many of her frocks, the furs and the diamond earrings that Marini had made her buy.

Marini was not cruel; but when her beauty waned his love for it went too; when her voice failed, his uses for it must fail too.

He was obliged to leave her behind in Paris, recuperating, her contract done, her last resources dwindling, while he returned to London with the rest of his company. Their engagements made this imperative, anyway.

"Remain in Paris, my dear," he said to Anna before he went; "rest all you can; you will find nice work. Try, try to get your lovely looks back. The looks can remain if the voice is gone, eh? You see, you had too much. The gods decided not to leave you both, my dear. Isn't it so? Courage!"

"Yes," Anna said to herself when he had gone. "Courage! That's all that is left me." She hung on to that, therefore, with despairing hands. She thought:

"I have been poor; I can be poor again." And then: "Where is he? Has he failed too?" Her heart said with certainty: "Yes, inevitably he failed too. It was too big for both of us. The top of the world is far too high."

But she did not remain in Paris. She changed her last francs, and Christmas saw her in London. She went straight to her old rooms, and they were unoccupied; the recent tenant had left. She took them with actual joy. Their mere walls seemed so friendly now that she stood, indeed, alone. Lucia had gone, and King Garnet was lost; and Silver Garnet, that tempestuous fool, he was lost too. She had read the announcement of his engagement.

Her former landlady received her with pleasure, with disappointment and pity. She unpacked her few things, settled down once more on that homely hearth, and sombrely thought. "For the first time in my working life," she thought, "I am workless in London. I have no luxury trade now. And my recommendations—if Silver will give them—are a year old."

That very night she searched the columns of every paper she could find in the near-by library for a job.

She slept a sleep like the dead, and awoke to find the landlady looking at her, carrying a cup of tea. As Anna sat up in the cold room to drink it the woman asked, "Have you any work, Miss Land?" And at the shake of the head, "But you'll have made money?"

"And spent it," said Anna grimly. "I have been very ill."

The woman made sincere sounds of pity; but, anxious and ashamed of her obvious anxiety, still stood beside the bed.

"Why?" said Anna gently.

"Oh, miss," murmured the hard-worked creature, "you

know how highly I think of you ; but I have an offer for these rooms for the end of next week."

" Take it," said Anna Land, clinging to her old way of asking nothing. " I think I can pay till then."

The landlady went out, sorrowful but relieved.

" I mustn't ask," Anna thought. " I mustn't ask. Yet I nearly did it then. I've got soft with my beautiful year, and now I have to grow hard again."

She rose, dressed and tramped the streets for work. She put herself down at agency after agency ; she applied at shop after shop, and came home.

As by a malign miracle, the beauty of surroundings, the ease and grace of her new life vanished, and the old order of things re-established itself, but intensified fourfold.

" You will get some work," said the landlady, consolatory but obviously pessimistic. " And where are all your rich new friends, dearie ? "

But Anna Land was alone.

" What is one defeat ? " said Anna to herself on the tenth day, when Christmas had come and gone, blankly. Her purse was almost empty, and her very roof would, in forty-eight hours or so, be hers no longer. " What is one defeat ? "

She knew it was the whole defeat of her secret empire all the same. She was sick to the soul, and scorning herself for it ; she wept at nights and laughed at her contemptible self in the morning ; she was tired from the destructive fever, and her limbs refused to go lightly. They dragged like lead.

So when a knock fell on her door—a peremptory knock with the head of a stick—on the tenth day, she opened it, expecting little, and saw Silver Garnet. A warmth leaped to her heart, brightness to her eyes, colour to her face. She was not forgotten !

" Silver ! "

" My dear girl ! "

He came in jauntily, his eyes as bright as hers with anticipation, but keen, scrutinising. He laid his hat and stick on the table, looked rapidly round the room. Its gay chintzes—which months ago Anna had left freely to the landlady—were soiled, the fire was unlighted in the grate.

His eyes came to Anna, looked her over swiftly. He saw her with her radiance dim, her beauty lack-lustre, and a certain wounded-soldier pathos showed through the gallant front she kept now as ever. He took it all in in a few seconds of time.

"Silver, how splendid of you to find me!"

"B-r-r-r! My dear"—he shuddered distastefully—"light the fire."

"Of course, it's cold," she cried, colouring still higher than she had done at his advent; from sheer physical weakness she paled and flushed easily now. She knelt down and lighted the fire, which, rather damp, responded slowly. She coaxed it.

"I do look inhospitable here," she said, on her knees.

The fire burned; she looked up and saw Silver close by, looking down eagerly and keenly upon her. He put his hands down and helped her up with a squeezing grasp on each elbow.

"Now," he smiled, "sit down. Let's hear the news."

"Yours first," said Anna, remembering his old proclivities.

"Oh, mine? You read mine in the papers these days, don't you?"

"I read that you are going to be married. All my best wishes to you."

"Good of you, I'm sure. Thanks," he responded, a little guardedly.

"When is it to be, Silver?"

"End of February."

"You must be finding life wonderful."

"I am," said Silver with a laugh.

"And—and your—family?"

"Are you asking after my stepmother or my half-brother?"

"Both."

"Oh, both, are you, my dear? My stepmother blooms. My half-brother——" He regarded her a little suspiciously.

"Aren't you in touch with him, then?"

"I haven't seen or heard of him for eight months, Silver."

He appeared gratified.

"Glad to hear it, I'm sure. I don't want to hear much of him these days. But—he's about somewhere, isn't he?"

"Is he? I don't know. Tell me——"

"A-ha! You're anxious."

"I—he was a friend of mine. I'd like to know——"

"I have nothing to tell you," said Silver, growing dark. "I received something that reminded me of him the other day, that's all."

"What was the something? Tell me."

"A-ha! How anxious you are! Best of you women are fools where your own interests are concerned. Leave him alone! The something was just a little sum of money—nine pounds eleven shillings, to be exact."

"Oh?"

"He owed it me—that's all," said Silver. He flushed darkly, and she changed into: "And the works?"

"I've sold them."

Her mind went blank with disappointment. Then she said, "Oh, I'd hoped——"

"Hoped what? Now tell me, my dear. I'm here to listen."

His eyes shone. He stretched his legs to the fire and looked at the meagre blaze contemptuously.

"I long to tell you—to talk to someone, Silver. I've talked to no one but my landlady for two weeks. And to see a friend is wonderful."

Tears came easily to her, like pallor and blushes, just now; and impatiently, scornfully, she fought them back. But Silver had seen them. He bent towards her.

"Tell me what you'd hoped from the works?"

"A job again—some sort of job. My old one's filled, I dare say."

"Of course it is! There's no lack of women for jobs like that."

"You know my voice has gone?"

"It was in the *Telegraph*—a little paragraph mentioning your substitute in 'La Bohême' at Covent Garden. The paragraph said you had to take a long rest. I knew what that would mean to you. I got on to Marini—well, his secretary replied, and told me they had left you in Paris. He gave the address of your nursing home there. I found out next that you had come to London. I guessed where I'd find you." He looked again around the familiar yet somewhat forlorn room. "You're a great girl for making a nest and homing to it. What a nest though!"

His contempt was on the air.

"Oh, Silver, how kind you are!" she said passionately.

"Kind?"

"To take all that trouble to find me out."

Still he bent forward, searching her face. "I want to be kind, my dear girl. I mean to be kind."

"You guess I'm in the last ditch, I suppose, Silver?"

A quiet gratification grew in Silver's face, but she misread it. She went on: "I've searched for work; but—no luck so far. I'd find it in time; I know that. But—but I haven't time to lose, because I haven't the money. I'm broke."

"And you're still pretty sick?" he observed sympathetically, persuasively.

She nodded. Tears were in her eyes again at his kindness, and she was desperately ashamed of them.

"Not yourself at all, I can see," he continued.

"I haven't had long to—to get well in, Silver. I was really quite ill, and——"

"Poor girl!" He rose and leaned against the table near her chair. His hand crept to her shoulder and lay there, caressing. He could look down upon the top of her head, as beautiful, as shapely as ever. "You must let me help you now. Tell me, just what money have you?"

"Six shillings," she laughed, so that she would not cry. She could not see the gratification in Silver's face above her.

"Come," he said, "you are low down, aren't you? Proud little thing, too, aren't you? Could have rung me up any time, couldn't you? Well, never mind. I've made the concession, you see; I've come to you. You must let me take care of you."

"If you would lend——"

"Lend!" Silver scoffed.

"You know me. You know I would repay——"

"I used to know you—what you were. But you're different now. Confess it. Ah, I know that too! You haven't got life all in your own hands, Anna. Well, never mind; you have me behind you."

"Silver——" He took his chair again—the uneasy oak armchair so well remembered—while Anna sat in a straight one by the table.

"Come, Anna, what have the last months taught you? Haven't they taught you how much sweeter and nicer it is for a woman to have the good things of life? How suitable they are to her? Eh? Haven't you learned to love comfort and hate privation? Come, be honest with me, my dear, and tell me."

Anna looked long at Silver, and all the havoc in his very soul was plain to her. She saw the outward changes—the fat of his body, the hardened eye, the greed of living that proclaimed itself in every lineament; and she saw the inward change too; she saw his soul marching with its

boon companion, his indulged body. And she thought of the evenings at Paolo's, she and Silver—a lean Silver, full of fires—across a table talking dreams and plans; and she remembered how Silver's mind had been full of gifts and sacrifice.

"The last few months have changed you," she said in a low voice.

"Certainly; I hope so!" Silver responded with a laugh. She looked at him a long time, and fell into one of her old wonderments. Silver watched her. He got up again.

"Come!" he said in a sharp voice that was yet caressing. "Wake up, my dear! Consider what I'm saying. Let me look after you. You shall never want again. I promise you——"

"Silver——" Her doubts were so patent to Silver that he proceeded to explain more rashly.

"I'll provide for you. I'll take you out of this——"

"You're being married in February to Lady Mabel Conway. You can't break your engagement, even if—and I wouldn't—couldn't—as you've always known——"

"Break my engagement? Am I a fool? No! Are you a fool, too, my dear? You are not! So don't pretend to be. You're a woman of the world by now; you're also right on your uppers; down and out, a place where it suits no pretty woman to be. Come to me; I'll provide."

She cried, "Stop! Be quiet, Silver! Do you think I'll come?"

He nodded. "Yes, I do think you'll come. If not to-day, in two days, in three days. I'll starve you into coming, Anna. I told you when we last parted that my time would arrive, and it has! But I'll look after you and be good to you. I will! You'll have all you want, in reason, and I'm crazy about you, now as much as ever."

He would have taken her into his arms, but she eluded him; she stepped round the table, crying breathlessly, "You aren't asking me to marry you, now, Silver——"

Silver was crude these days. He still believed and still had reason to believe that wealth did all.

He said, "No, Anna, not now." And his look, blatant, unmerciful, explained the gulf he thought he saw between them.

"And I thought you wanted to help me!" she wailed, at last in tears, broken. "I thought you were wonderful to come here—you beast, Silver! You brute! Get out!"

"I could stay here as long as I liked," said Silver brutally, for his anger was always quick, and it was beginning to rouse. He measured her with his eye.

"Get out!" she cried.

"Is that what you say to me?"

"It's all I have to say to you. Get out!"

A long silence of appalling ugliness fell between them. They stared at each other, the weeping girl and the baulked and angry man. The silence was not broken—save by Anna's sobbing breath—till Silver took up his hat and stick from the table. He settled the hat on his head and looked at her.

"You can ring me up, my dear, any time you like," he said. "And we'll make our bargain. It will be worth your while. And—you'll have to come to it."

Then he went out, without an answer from her.

Anna drew a long breath. She flew to the closed door and locked it. But as she turned the key she knew the action to be futile. For only forty-eight hours longer could she keep out the marauder of sheer, stark want. She returned to the table and sat down. She sighed, and laid her head on her arms and abandoned herself to the rare luxury of weeping. Silver had struck her to the soul.

She had no words, no thoughts, into which to crystallise what had happened. Silver's offer—base, brutal, undecorated—staggered and appalled her. Her wave of anger passing, she felt numb. With her arms limply on the table and her head limply on them, she tried con-

fusedly to marshal all the facts and her chances. What she kept seeing was that little, little sum of six shillings between her and destitution ; that paltry sum with which, when lost, she would lose her dignity, her pride, her peace, her privacy, her precarious independence. All these assets now hung on the six shillings. It was Silver's visit which showed her that. He had made her see exactly how a lone, weak, beautiful, workless, friendless woman stood. He had done her that service in his monstrous way.

She saw it bitterly while time crept on, as a service. He showed her Anna Land beaten ; Anna Land flying not before just one defeat, but before all defeat ; Anna Land on her knees to the world.

She saw. She began slowly, reluctantly, painfully to sort out, array, readjust her dearest hopes, her highest principles. She wondered which one she could let go. This one ? That one ? What compromise should be offered ? What treasures ceded ? What surrender made to the world ? One by one she took and examined her dear hopes, the stars by which she had made her glad and lonely way, and it seemed as if her spirit must live by this manna from her heaven or not at all. She took back each star into her heart and soul, jealously to cherish it. She cried out aloud in the dark room : " I cannot let one go ! "

Feet ascended the stair again ; heavy, flat, tired feet. Her door was tried ; again a knock fell upon it. She awoke from her abstractions of despair and opened to her landlady ; and the perfumes of a garden wafted into the room. The drab woman's arms and upheld apron were full of flowers—early lilacs, roses, carnations, lilies.

" There's some friend," she said with a roguish look that sat quaintly on her poor face, " as hasn't forgotten you."

She put the flowers into Anna's slow arms, turned and clattered downstairs again. Anna Land stood on her

threshold speechless. She thought of Silver. He had gone straight from her to his florist; in the lavish way of his vanity, seeking to impress her, had he sent this load of beauty for her to think over, sleep with, dream about, awake for in the morning? Silver had done this?

So she stood uncertain for a while, hating the flowers, and then carried them within. There was no note; that was not like Silver. He would surely proclaim a gift. His card would have been there, tied on with silver ribbon.

Perhaps Lucia—no, Lucia had no money left for such things; she was giving all she had to the poor.

Perhaps Marini?

Anna thought with a grateful heart: "It's good of him. It's like him. He sends these for the New Year. But oh, if he only knew that I want food!"

It made her laugh again her unconquerable laugh, seeing herself here with ten pounds' worth of hot-house flowers, at least, in her arms, and not a square meal in the place anywhere.

She disposed her flowers about the room, in the old accustomed places. The room took a beauty once more. When she had done she sat and looked at them, hands clasped on her lap, remembering. She remembered King Garnet's flowers—just such profusion; and Silver's little bunch of violets lying on the table. Then, a little later, there were Silver's flowers in just such profusion; and King Garnet came one spring day with a little bunch of violets in his hand. She remembered all the gifts acutely.

Nine o'clock chimed from a neighbouring church clock, while still Anna Land sat there by the light of a dying fire, looking at the heavenly flowers in the room's dark shadows.

Very tiredly her landlady came up again to put a letter into her hand.

"Last post," she said. She leaned upon the table exhaustedly, wiping her brow with an apron corner. "I've finished my ironing. Hope you've got good news there. It's typewritten; might be business, eh?"

She leaned there, watching with true concern the letter in Anna's hand.

"It might be anything," said Anna a little light-headedly.

"Open it," the landlady encouraged her. "I've known what it is to feel like you do—afraid to open a letter for fear things will be worse'n they are already. But take yer pluck in yer 'ands and read it, my dear."

Anna obeyed, laughing again with no ghost of a reason for laughter. And she read that Miss Anna Land's name had been given by the Regulations Employment Agency to the Garfield Gold Mines, Ltd., for the position of head woman clerk, and would the applicant call to see the managing director at 11.30 the next morning?

"Well?" urged the landlady.

"I'll land it!" said Anna half to herself. "I'll land it! I—I'm saved! I—I—I must get it and that's all there is to it!"

She clutched the letter to her breast.

"Work?" cried the landlady.

Anna nodded.

"Perhaps," she said. She sighed and relapsed laxly in her chair.

"Supper's what you want," said the landlady. "Got anything in? No? Well, I'll bring you up a bit of ours. Then 'ave a good sleep. Land the job! Of course you'll land it—you, with your manners and recommendations! Cocoa, my dear, and bread and cheese I can manage, and you shall 'ave it right away."

Again she went down the stairs, heavy, flatfooted.

Again Anna laid her head on her arms and wept from sheer inability to stop the tears.

XXIV.

So once again, as she could remember doing at various anxious turning-points of her life before the present catastrophe, Anna Land groomed herself and toned herself up and toned herself down with careful calculation about what a particular employer might be looking for, and set out for the Garfield Company in Holborn. She went by omnibus all the way, wishing to appear fresh and vigorous, guarding against giving any unwelcome impression of fatigue or fragility, and she had given herself a decent breakfast. More frightened than she had ever been, wiser than she had ever been, more desperately willing to please than she had ever been, she walked into the room of the managing director.

She heard all the little sounds with sharpened ears; she heard the office boy close the door behind her softly as he did it; she saw all with sharpened eyes, and she had seen the inkpot and pens and letters and calendar and the exact pattern in the wheel back of the revolving chair from which the managing director presented a broad back, before he swung round very slowly and faced her.

His hands were on either arm of the chair, brown hands, stretched and hard, with the long welts of healed scars upon the backs. His face was brown and thin and hard and strong; his shoulders broad, his mouth set, his eyes like two lamps looking out at her.

She started back, the blood ran into her cheeks and lips and drained away. She saw swimming before her all the roses and lilies and lilacs of last night—his tribute as of old!

She staggered and called "King!" and fainted.

She woke; she was lying flat on the floor, her hat

removed, King Garnet kneeling beside her, kissing her hands, whispering her name. His kisses awoke her as surely as did the kisses of the prince awake the sleeping princess. She came out of a trance and found herself in a happy land, but did not know where. She saw his anxious, loving face bent over her. She opened her lips to speak, and with the lightest, tenderest of kisses he closed them.

"I—I wanted to surprise you, Anna," he said like a little boy.

Then Anna laughed. He lifted her up in his arms, and there she lay.

"Where shall I put you?"

"Where you like," said Anna.

So he carried her to the huge leather chair beside his desk and laid her there.

He said, "My most honoured visitor," and kneeling down, put his forehead against her shoulder. "Darling, you're better? I surprised you too much."

She nodded. "I've been ill; I'm stupid——"

"Put your arm round my neck, Anna," he said, with his head against her shoulder, her arm close about him, "I've been thinking, imagining this for months."

"Months?"

"Ever since I struck gold. You don't know where I've been. I've been to the Yukon, and luck was with me, as it is with some men sometimes. I saw men die of greed and failure, and they murdered each other for greed, and robbed and fought and schemed and sweated and worked themselves to skeletons; and I—the second week I was there I struck it."

"I can't—quite—understand——"

He took her face between his two hands. He looked into her eyes triumphantly.

"I've done what you told me to. I've won!"

"You've won?"

"I worked like hell when I thought I knew what I'd found. I didn't hope; it might have been a false lode.

It just wasn't. I struck veins such as no man has struck there for twenty years, they say. I worked like hell! All for you, my darling darling. Every step I went, every inch I dug, every time I heaved that blasted pickaxe in I saw you, Anna! Fellows came out from the City; I could have sold my claim for a hundred thousand dollars before it was properly tested at all. I didn't. Company promoters and engineers came out by the dozen. You should have seen 'em! But I was counting everything for you, Anna; and—I was cool as death. I waited. I got the real men. It—it's working fine! The company's floated; I take over the London office. . . . Now isn't that enough of the darned business till presently? It's all here; all right; working like a machine; solid. The public's coming in. . . . Tell me of you. You're all that matters."

"You've won, King?"

"For you."

"I've failed."

"No, no, Anna! My dearest—I know. I know what's happened. Lie still; don't worry; don't think. I'm here." And he put his arms tight about her.

When he said that she knew that she had lost her child and found her man. Her heart leaped and triumphed.

Holding his head to her, she whispered, "You know about Marini, and my illness? Everything?"

"Everything that matters. I've been sitting here for a month, waiting for you, trying to trace you, get hold of you. As soon as I'd found you I told the agency. Now I have you. And, Anna, I'm big enough for you, eh?"

"You! . . . But, King, I've failed!"

"You've won! You've put me right where I am now. You've made me! You've done all! Now I'm yours! What'll you do with me?"

"King?"

"I know what you'll do with me," he said.

"King?"

"You'll marry me."

In each other's arms they thrilled.

"Oh, King, at last, at last——"

"You can't let me down now. You promised some day—if I could climb to you——"

"Now you're beyond."

"Oh! All that stuff, Anna! Say it's stuff! I'm yours and you're mine. We're together, walking together like we always have been. Only you used to have to pull me along. Now that's over. Now I'm on my feet, and it's my turn, you little sick thing as pale as a primrose, it's my turn to put my arms round you and lift you on to yours. Oh, Anna, my darling, isn't it like that?"

Anna Land lay in the arms of the man she had made stronger than herself, and she whispered, "Is it?"

"Do you love me?"

"I love you."

"Isn't the world fine, Anna?"

"It's fine if you'll stay like this. If you don't let me go."

He laughed.

"You don't need to tell me that. Let you go? Never! Never! Never! Till the end of the world, my dear, and beyond then! I'll hold you in eternity."

Her hands about his neck, she looked into his face. Her eyes were blurred with tears, her mouth tremulous with laughter. She looked at his strong face, his scarred brow, his straight eyes; she felt the sinews of his arms, and at last knew the sinews of his soul as strong. She felt his man's hands. He was grown; he was big; he was fine—all she had ever desired him to be. And she knew suddenly and secretly that here lay the achievement that had been her dearest heart's hope; here reared her pinnacle of power; here before her lay the future spread

for her choosing as she stood with him upon the top of their hill.

She ceased to listen for the dead applause of forgotten multitudes, and lay in his arms and laughed.

"In the whole world," she said, "there's not a prouder woman than I."

THE END.